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THE MAGAZINE OF INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES

ELECTRONIC games

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 7



SEATTLE'S
ZOMBIE
A VIRTUAL-REALITY CHECK

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July, 1995



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Ah, to live the Cyberlife. **Digital Mantras** from MIT press. **Dragon Lore** from Prima.

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 MIDWAY

POWER ON

The End of an Era—Hooray!

This is the final *Electronic Games*. Save the tears; this is a celebration, not a funeral.

Like the headline at the top of this page says, it's the end of an era. It began in 1981 when Joyce Worley, Bill Kunkel and I started the original *Electronic Games*, the world's first computer and video game magazine. It ends when the last copy of this issue vanishes from the newsstand.

Let's remember the high editorial standards, the investigative stories and the news exclusives. It's proper to recall the men and women who pooled their writing, reporting, editorial and artistic talents for the last three years to make *Electronic Games* a magazine adults can read without shame or apology.

Now that we've saluted the passing of *Electronic Games*, let's can the hearts and flowers. The appropriate phrase is "au revoir," not "good bye." An era is ending, but another begins in August.

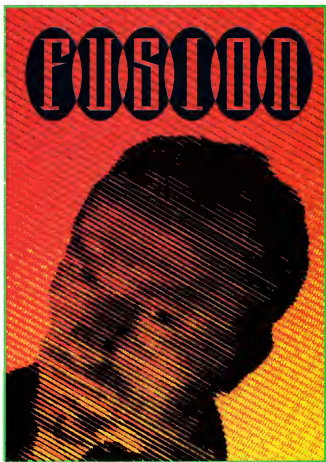
Electronic Games is gone, but in its place comes *Fusion*. It's going to be everything *EG* ever was—and a lot more. We've been building toward this since fall 1992, and I can't wait to tell you about it now that we are fully loaded and ready to rock.

First the name. This may be sacrilege, but it was definitely time for a change. "Electronic Games" is easily confused with other magazines, and it doesn't accurately describe the contents.

I never wanted to saddle this magazine with the "EG" name. It was great for the '80s, but this is the '90s—and the millennium is just around the corner.

Electronic Gaming Monthly, also published by the Sendai Media Group, is hugely successful and popular, but its readers average a decade younger than ours. "Electronic Games" sounds like it should have a zillion screen shots and strategy maps on every page, and that's 180 degrees away from our mission.

The magazine's new name symbolizes the fusion of electronic and print journalism. A print magazine alone doesn't give today's sophisticated funseekers the full-spectrum



coverage they demand. That's why *Fusion* has an on-line area and, coming soon, CD-ROM discs. Neither replaces the hard copy version of *Fusion*, but they broaden and strengthen our ability to cover every facet of interactive electronic entertainment.

That's another reason the old name had to go. We've never been "just games," but "Electronic Games" misled readers and advertisers.

Fusion expands and extends the *EG* editorial policy to encompass the full range of interactive experiences. Whether it's the 64-Bit consoles, computer multimedia, the latest in virtual reality or the hottest WWW sites on the Internet, if it's electronic interactive and fun, you'll read about it in *Fusion*.

Fusion is more than just incisive hardware and software reviews. Our staff of tough-but-fair critics is still on the job, but reviews are only one part of the mix.

Fusion confronts the flashpoint issues and

investigates the trends that shape the way we spend our leisure time.

We won't neglect the people and companies behind the entertainment products, either. *Fusion* brings the men and women who shape interactive entertainment to readers in colorful, probing interviews. Companies, developers, artists and even pop culture gurus from other fields of entertainment will share their vision in provocative columns and features.

Your favorite *EG* writers are scheduled for *Fusion*, but expect some major new names, too. Journalistic standards must keep improving to keep pace with the field. We've never stood still, and *Fusion* will be a dramatic leap into new frontiers of electronic fun.

Interactive entertainment has mushroomed from a niche market ghetto to a mainstream interest for millions of Americans. It's an integral part of popular culture, like movies and television.

The hard core electronic gaming audience is still there. It's an important part of the audience, but there are already many magazines that serve it.

Fusion is the interactive entertainment magazine for the rest of us. Its reviews, interviews, lifestyle features and investigative reports are designed to give the connected readers access to everything that's exciting and involving in interactive entertainment.

Electronic Games is dead.

Long live *Fusion*!

by Arnie Katz

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Future...On Your
PC Today"**

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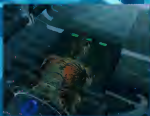
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FEEDBACK

It's the Combos that Count

Well, someone came and complained about *Killer Instinct* (*Feedback*, April '95). I agree with them that the game is terrible. That has to be the worst combo system in the entire arcade. Rare should be ashamed of itself. But what I don't agree with is that it is the worst title out there or that it took the title from *MKII*, which took it from *MKI*. There are worse games, homeslice. I agree that the programming and game play are choppy in the *MK* series (well, not *MK3* so much), but they're better than *Killer Instinct*, and it's better than some other fighting games.

Now let's talk about good combo systems: I don't like the one in the pathetic *X-Men* so I won't really touch that one, but I really like the *Primal Rage* and *MK3* combo systems. As for *MK3* itself, the feel is not there ... It isn't like playing the dark, pseudo-Oriental, kung-fu-like *Mortal Kombat*. It's playing a futuristic oddity. And while some fatalities like Sub-Zero's are pretty good, other fatalities are just ludicrous. How could Kano possibly rip a skeleton out of someone? That's the same complaint I have about *Primal Rage* ... the fatalities are so goofy.

The game play and some actual good fatalities will make *MK3* a good game as well as a popular one in the arcades ... while pure boredom in the same thing over and over will keep *Primal Rage* relatively tame as far as the money-making is concerned. This is because although Atari has made a good effort at actually entering the arcade race, Midway has enough schemes up its sleeves to waste the competition. Even Capcom's *Street Fighter Legends* may fold under the pressure of *Mortal Kombat 3*.

Pat Coffman
urmom@mcl.ucsb.edu

Hurt Feelings

Rich Heimlich: "Your writing is complete



garbage." How would you like to see that statement in an international magazine read by thousands, with nothing to back it up?

I refer you to the line, "Meanwhile, ReadySoft can't even get the port of the original *Dragon's Lair* on any platform right." (*Heimlich Maneuver*, *EG*, May 1995) You offer no justification for making such a claim. I would like to know what exactly you found wrong with the versions of *Dragon's Lair* that merit such a comment. The people who worked long and hard to produce this game deserve more than just an off-hand remark that downgrades their toil. Your readers also deserve more so that they may make up their own minds about the product.

To add further insult to injury you suggest that the readers who enjoy these games, and there are a great deal of them judging by the sales, are nothing but mindless dolts who would enjoy nothing more than the childish humor of pulling your finger. As for your

comment about these being memory games, memory can be a factor in many games. In fighting games, a pattern can be used to defeat your opponents. Is this not also a case of doing movements from memory?

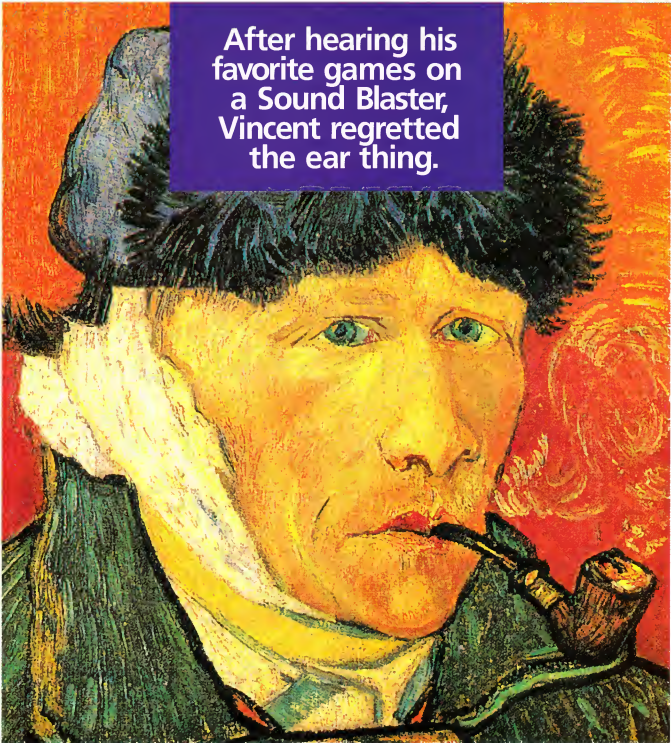
While your article offers some worthwhile comments on the industry as a whole, [and] you have your views and a right to express them, I believe that it would be more beneficial to your readers, both the end users and the industry, if you offered a suggestion to better the games rather than just cutting up existing ones.

Whether you like it or not, these genres exist in the industry. Titles such as *Myst* and *The 7th Guest* are responsible for widening the audience of gaming consumers. They offer a reprieve from the abundant platform games and fighting games. I believe that the number of adult players have largely increased due to games such as *Myst* and *7th Guest* because they offer brilliant graphics and something more than just mindless button pushing. Games such as *Dragon's Lair* offer wonderful graphics, as well as the opportunity to play the very games that we grew up with.

David Elton
Product Manager, ReadySoft

Letter Contest

Win an STD controller! Each month *EG* selects one letter and the writer gets a choice of one of *STD's* fine line of controllers for consoles and computers.



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Rich's article began with noting how many quarters he put into the *Dragon's Lair* coin-op when it came out. He's familiar with the game and was disappointed with its implementations on various platforms.

But your own point about *Myst* and 7th Guest applies, David. Good game play needs something beyond good looks and rote or twitch action. His point is summed up when he says, "It's time to take all this new technology and do something better with it." Isn't that what we all want? And aren't you disappointed when new products don't meet the expectations created by their hype?

Lowest Common Disk Operator

Re Feedback (May '95) on *Heimlich Maneuver* in the April *EG*: By catering to the lowest common denominator, software designers are in jeopardy of alienating the people who have allowed them to get to this position: the game players.

A large percentage of the new computer purchases are by people under the "if you don't own a PC, you won't be able to function properly in today's society" spell. The affected ones run to the nearest computer super store and proceed to purchase an underpowered, overpriced paperweight. After gaining confidence in their ability to connect the cords properly, they come face to face with the dreaded "DISK OPERATING SYSTEM." No matter how simple the interface, it will never be as easy as setting the clock on the VCR! The number of blinking 12:00 a.m.s on VCRs across America should give you a good idea of how many of these PCs will be gathering dust in the backs of closets within a few months.

In the meantime, the gamers are disgusted about taking a step backward to cater to this misconceived audience. By the time a lot of the products that were intended for this audience are released, many of them will have already given up. Those who remain are still there because they have become gamers and so they will have no interest in this pabulum product either. So... the way I see it, you have no audience!

Bob "Smoke" Smolka
Staten Island, NY

Whose audience is missing, Smoke? Ours is not exactly one of pabulum fanciers, we trust. However, we know some DOS experts who can't fathom VCR programming, either.

Words of Praise

I hope you continue with the interview articles. The interview with the creators of *Donkey Kong Country* was particularly good. Please continue publishing these types of articles. I like articles that make me think; your magazine seems to have more of these than any other. For example, the Virtual Sex



feature was particularly noteworthy.

Keep the section on the Internet. Good idea to expand it. I am glad that you are willing to present different viewpoints on electronic gaming, as in Rich Heimlich's monthly articles. The decreased emphasis on the reviews also does a lot for the magazine. I like to read about original or well-done games, but every game that pretends to be *Doom* does not deserve the space. Before *EG*, I read [another video game magazine] for a few years until I got hooked on your magazine. *EG* offers more content and better content. Keep up the good work! I am looking forward to the next issue.

LORDTYM@delphi.com

A lot of your thinking parallels ours. See Arnie Katz's editorial—and *Fusion*, next month—for changes that will make this even more the magazine you want.

Soturn Distinction

I am an active duty military member stationed in Okinawa, Japan. I would like to know if I purchased a Sega Saturn system here in Japan, would I be able to play games made in the U.S. for the American Sega Saturn system? I would also like to know if I purchased a Sega Saturn system in the U.S., would it be compatible to play Japanese games made in Japan for the Sega Saturn system there? Finally, is this the same situation for the Sony PlayStation, Ultra 64 and the Sega 32X? If yes, will there be a converter for the systems to allow compatibility? As you know, it can be quite expensive to purchase a system and then

find out that you cannot buy any games for it.

L. A. Morales-Oliva
Fajardo, Puerto Rico

No, to both parts of the Sega Saturn question. Sega has placed a block in the software specifically to make the Japanese and American systems incompatible. It is possible some third-party manufacturer may create a converter, but Sega's Japanese and American divisions have separate sales and marketing goals and demographic design parameters and have no wish for the cross-shipping nightmares. As to the other products, while we have heard no statements on this topic, the same conditions would apply.

Internet Rules

Nice to see your editorial on the Internet (*Power ON!*, April)—dead-on for the most part. We're seeing a fair amount of backlash to the Information superhighway hype, which is surprising no one with any real experience on the Internet.

Still, the World Wide Web is cool and may actually be worth real money some day. The folks at Internet Shopping Network were bought by the Home Shopping Network (TV) folks and now offer Omaha Steaks as well. They're also paying *Infoworld* for the use of their reviews and articles—perhaps *EG* should consider a tie to their site?

Ken Meltsner
meltsner@ctc.com

We're going our own way, Ken, as you'll no doubt discover soon in *Fusion*.

Thanks for your letters. Write to:
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HOTLINE

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Compiled by Joyce Worley
& Ross Chamberlain



Nintendo Buys Rare Stake

For the first time, Nintendo's Rare deal marks its first investment in any video game developer outside of Japan.

Nintendo agreed to buy a 25 percent interest in Rare, Ltd., the group that created **Donkey Kong Country**, marking the first time Nintendo ever invested in a video game developer outside of Japan. The details of the sale were not released, but Nintendo admitted it was a multimillion dollar deal.

Howard Lincoln explained: "Based on the tremendous worldwide success of **Donkey Kong Country** and **Killer Instinct**, it's clear that Rare is the best video game developer in the world. Just like the movie industry where there are a handful of people who make great movies, the video game industry only has a few people who make great games. Nintendo considers the Rare team the 'Spielberg' of video game development."

Joel Hochberg, president of Rare, expressed enthusiasm about the future of the company now that it has joined Nintendo. "With the creative and technical expertise of Nintendo and Rare, we'll not only continue to produce the best video games in the industry, but we already have defined the standard of 'next generation.' We have searched the world over for top-notch

talent and have brought them together in an entity that will, without a doubt, continue to blow the competition away."

Sally Reavis, a Corporate Communications spokeswoman for Nintendo of America, explained why the company made this move. "Frankly, Nintendo wants to build its own game development capabilities. If you want to stay the leader in

this industry, you have to be the best at developing games. We firmly believe that Chris and Tim Stamper are two of the most talented developers in this industry. Their work with **Donkey Kong Country** and with the arcade game **Killer Instinct** demonstrated that they are clearly the innovative and creative leaders in that arena."

As to how Nintendo will

utilize Rare: "They'll work with us to develop games for all of our hardware platforms." There are projects planned for the SNES, Ultra 64, Game Boy and Virtual Boy. Rare will be exclusive with Nintendo for all future game development.

Rare currently has 84 people on staff, but the investment will allow the company to increase to 250. This growth will enable



more projects, some of which are already in process.

"We plan on staying the leader," explained Reavis, "and our ability to create innovative games is somewhat contingent on the advanced technology that everyone is so hungry for. This is especially true in the fields of artificial intelligence and 3-D visualization."

Sally stopped short of predicting that Nintendo would move into virtual-reality experiences: "I think there is a tremendous appeal in experience realism in a video game and that is the direction we are headed. But to say that we are going to fully embrace virtual reality—that is probably down the road."

Rare teamed with Nintendo in 1994 to create **Donkey Kong Country** using their real-time 3-D technology called Advanced Computer Modeling. The game has already sold over 7.4 million cartridges worldwide. Rare is currently working on a sequel, and on a James Bond game based on the movie *Goldeneye*, now being filmed in England.

Following the purchase of the 25 percent stake, Rare's board of directors will consist of Joel Hochberg, Chris Stamper, Tim Stamper and Howard Lincoln.

Nintendo's Expansion

The acquisition of Rare raises questions about Nintendo's future plans for other investments.

Some months ago, Nintendo acquired a portion of Reflection Technology (the developers of the Virtual Boy technology).

STAR POWER

William Gibson, the man who coined the term "cyberspace," went there herself, via CompuServe and America OnLine, to talk about **Johnny Mnemonic**. ... Rodney Dangerfield is providing a joke of the day to the Web. ... Elvis Presley Enterprises won a trademark infringement suit against an Italian company that put out an unauthorized **CD Elvis on CD-ROM**. The court ordered a monetary settlement, and that all copies of the CD be destroyed. ... Zen Intergalactic Ninja (the comic-book hero) has his own Web site. ... MCI is sponsoring the Ambassadors of Baseball

"That project is completed, but Nintendo is still very happy with their relationship with that company," said Reavis. "Reflection is working on new devices, such as its portable that receives faxes on an LED screen. They are continuing to develop projects," said Sally.

As to the possibility of further acquisitions: "At this time there are no plans. However, Nintendo is interested in maintaining its leadership position in this industry. Given that, our investment in Rare is right on track with our plan to stay in the lead."

Reavis was forthcoming in her predictions: "As talented companies arise in this industry, there may be opportunities."

A Rare History

Rare Toys & Games has offices in England and in Connecticut, and Rare Coin-It is headquartered in Miami. The company started creating programming tools for the Nintendo system in 1984 and became Nintendo's first licensed developer outside of Japan. Rare's first game was **Slalom**, followed by **R.C. Pro-Am** and **Marble Madness**. The coin-op division started in 1992 and is best known for **X The Ball**, **Battletoads**, **Hot Shot**, **Basketball and Killer Instinct**.

Rare has also developed Nintendo games for many third-party companies, including Acclaim, Konami, Jaleco and others. (Joyce Worley)



World Tour of Navy and Marine Corps. bases, with former All-Stars. ... **Rob Roy Legends of the Myst** (MGM) is a companion piece to the movie, with history, clips and exclusive interviews with Liam Neeson and Jessica Lange. ... **Jasmine's Country Vid Grid** features such country artists as Reba McEntire, Vince Gill, George Jones and Tracy Byrd.

3DO INTRODUCES THE M2

Trip Hawkins, 3DO's president and CEO, calls the long-awaited new 3DO machine, "a quantum leap for the industry in both graphics speed and quality." He bragged, "We're raising the bar again. ... Nobody else has anything like M2."

The M2 player, formerly nicknamed the Bulldog, promises seven to 10 times more power than either the Sony PlayStation or Sega Saturn. The 64-Bit player is based on



custom graphics, sound and I/O processors that can process more than 1 million polygons per second. MPEG-1 is built in, and the memory subsystem is capable of 528 Megabytes per second.

The new player will hit the market with two or

three arcade games; then in the next 90 days, there will be 8-10 more M2 releases. By the end of the year, there should be 25-45 M2 titles available.

The M2 is backwardly compatible, so all existing 3DO titles will play. It has internal memory, for game-saving options and slots for future peripherals, including a modem, keyboard and joysticks.

The graphics have been enhanced; it's faster (66 MHz RISC), can support full-motion video and has custom graphics, such as texture mapping and compression, filtering, Gouraud shading, 3-D perspective and special effects.



ULTRA 64 DELAYED TO '96

Nintendo revealed that its new Ultra 64 game system, now in development with Silicon Graphics, Inc., will not be released in the United States this year. The advanced console, which had been expected to premier in time for the Christmas buying season, will appear in April '96.

Nintendo spokesmen say that the final chipset has been completed, and the Ultra 64 will actually be unveiled Nov. 24 at the Video Game Exhibition in Japan. Americans will get their first look at the CES show Jan. 5, 1996, in Las Vegas.

Howard Lincoln says that the hardware will retail for less than \$250. He explained the reason for the delay in the much-anticipated new console: "We've decided to give our software developers additional time to maximize the power of this system in their game creation. We're dedicated to delivering games that are a quantum leap beyond any that have preceded them."

Tom Jermoluk, president of Silicon Graphics, agreed. "With the graphics and audio generated by the final chipset, I'd say that even we're amazed."

CYBER-RIG TOTES HIGHWAY

Cyberphobes and others fearful of braving the Information Highway—at least, those who need to get on for business reasons—take heart. MCI is taking a fully loaded business office and TV studio on wheels across the country both to promote its network MCI software package and to help businesses get connected. The 48-foot 18-wheeler is outfitted with a 12-seat "techno-theater" and six workstations using 486 processors, fax/modems, windows and the network MCI business software. Four include desktop video conferencing.

CNN is also broadcasting its Talk Back Live show hosted by Susan Rook from the MCI Cyber-Rig from several cities along the tour route. The tour, which began in New York in February will circle through major cities of the U.S. until it returns to the Northeast in September.

An MCI-sponsored Gallup survey found 49 percent of white-collar workers were either intimidated by the Infobahn or resistant to new technology. "Eight of 10 business people see the Information Highway as here or on its way, but don't know how to approach it," said Scott Ross, MCI business markets president. "MCI is making house calls to American businesses to show how technology can shift their operations into high gear."

GERMAN COMPANY BUYS COMMODORE

Escom AG paid \$10 million in a bankruptcy court auction, for Commodore's name and patents and announced intentions to go into production. Escom entered into a joint venture with a Chinese company, Tianjin Family-Issued Multimedia, to manufacture Commodore computers, including the Amiga.

A spokesman for Escom said the company would revive the entire line and also use the technology in set-top control boxes for interactive TV.

Escom owns approximately 1500 European computer stores.

NETWORK NEWS

Nintendo's Web site, www.nintendo.com, features reviews, info, graphics, interviews. ... The Imagination Network lowered prime-time rates with a variety of rate plans. ... The Natural History Museum of London will put its Earth Sciences database on the Internet next year. ... Prodigy introduced enhancements that let users move between Prodigy and the Internet at no extra charge. ... Silicon Graphics and Template Graphics are working together on products to deliver 3-D and virtual reality to the Internet. ... fx Networks expanded its World Wide Web page; there are now more hot spots, a Graffiti Wall and color tours. ... Domark's **Confirmed Kill** (WWII flight sim) lets over 300 Interneters dogfight. ... ESPN

SportsZone signed Pro Football Weekly to provide gridiron news. The site is getting 1 million visitors per day. ... Compu-Serve now has over 3 million users. ... Pacific Bell will provide California businesses Internet services, via a set of access, hardware, software and transport services. ... MCI now offers Internet access and electronic shopping. ... Eight newspaper companies banded to form New Century Network, to provide on-line news services. ... Need concert data? Pollstar's website now has tour info that formerly only went to the music industry. ... Prodigy's e-mail lets members send photos. Seattle Filmworks develops film and digitizes the pix onto a disk.

HOT SPOTS

PR flacks have discovered the World Wide Web as a source of (relatively) cheap publicity, as witnessed by a raging torrent of TV, movie and music studio publicity pouring into the net. Three plucked at random from the datastream reveal Capitol record's **The Adam Ant Ant Farm**, the fx Network's **fx Web** and New Line Cinema's **Basketball Diaries** Site.

Ant Farm is Capitol's effort to push Adam Ant's *Wonderful* album. Netters who care can listen to a preview of the album's title track, and download games that include a shooting gallery with targets that "...represent the three 'expressive' stages of Adam Ant's career—Punk, Pirate and Indian." Yee-ha. Shoot him yourself at <http://caprec.com>.

The fx Network is the first network to launch a home page on the internet. The **fx Web Page** gives a color tour of the network's homepage, personal messages from various program hosts and a "graffiti wall" where users can sign in (of course), give feedback and read each other's comments about fx and its web page. Tell them what you think at <http://www.fxnet-works.com/fx/fxtop.html>.

Basketball Diaries is the Jim Carroll novel, the name of the upcoming movie based on it and the name of the web site set up to hype the movie. The site features hype from the film's press kit, still photos, audio & video clips, soundtrack information (will Carroll's *People Who Died* be on it? Somehow we doubt it), and the occasional on-line interview. New Line also promises to bring a **Mortal Kombot** site to the web soon. Point your web browser to <http://underground.net/BDiaries/>.

When you tire of the relentless hype, here's a couple of web sites to reset your reality registers:

HyperDiscordia: Confusion For a New Generation is a Website front for those organized embracers of chaos, the Discordian Society. Many artifacts and holy texts of the less-than-serious religion are available for viewing, including the full text of the official discordian bible, the *Principia Discordia*. There's even a hyper-text "map" of Discordian cyberspace, possibly the most circular web sight in all of cyberspace. For enquiring hunchbrains, there are many links to other weird web sites. Hail Eris, all hail Discordia! <http://vaxa.stevens->

tech.edu.8000.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation website is a required bookmark for anyone interested in freedom, privacy and legal affairs in the digiverse. Stay on top of serious issues involving encryption, the Clipper Chip, Censorship and the fate of the net at <http://ftp.eff.org>

FUNDING STOPPED FOR ARPANET

The government withdrew federal funding of ARPANet at the end of April 1995, marking the end of 25 years of cooperation between Federal and Educational agencies.

ARPANet, the first network, actually started the Internet. The Department of Defense founded DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Project Agency) to find a way to link defense-related computer facilities. The method they developed, in 1969, was packet switching, which enabled ARPANet to connect mainframe computers at UCLA, UCSB, Stanford, and University of Utah in 1970.

TEN LAUNCH SET FOR WINTER

Planet Optigon and Outland Inc. will merge to form The Total Entertainment Network (TEN), a next-generation on-line service. It's being funded by Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, the venture capitol firm that funded Electronic Arts, 3DO, AOL, Spectrum Holobyte, Netscape and others.

TEN is aimed at the multitudes of techno enthusiasts, with multi-player games, virtual environments, and other services. Daniel Goldman, President of Planet Optigon, says that joining forces with Outland will allow them to add Macintosh users to the service, which is already in beta test.

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
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*Requires optional digital video module.

THE DEAN OF INVIDEO

Dean Friedman may seem a most unlikely creator of high-tech entertainment. He had a top-20 hit in the summer of '77 with *Ariel*, and a top-10 hit in England in '78 with *Lucky Star*. During the '80s, Dean produced records, and did soundtracks for movies and TV. He still has extensive contacts in the musical world.

He graduated at age 15 from New York's City College with a music degree. Interested in technology, he wrote manuals, textbooks and consumer books about synthesizers. He was also a video game fan. His company, InVideo, actually comes from the combination of these two interests.

Because he always worked with video and computer software and multimedia too, Dean started making games. In 1989 he designed *Eat A Bug*, which was licensed to Nickelodeon. "I said, 'I can put a kid inside a video game.' They were a little skeptical. When I did the demonstration, it really knocked their socks off. That served as the prototype for the games that are now on the air on Nick Arcade. We programmed a dozen games for the first two series."

Those games became the basis of the InVideoGame System. "Because it is unencumbered—no gloves, no helmet—it gives people freedom of movement to run around, jump around and have a real, full-bodied aerobic-type experience."

The image of the player on screen interacts with the other objects in the picture, by use of a luminance key.

"This is a very traditional television technique. The software differentiates between very dark and very light," he explained. "The player is therefore treated like a shadow object; the player becomes the equivalent of a mouse pointer. Instead of manipulating a little character around, you have a large image of the player."

Although it was originally designed for children, InVideo has installed *Eat A Bug* in arcades, where it has done well. More adult entertainments such as *Virtual Volleyball* have toured museums around the country; many places it appeared bought the installations.

The technology is also being used in edutainment products, such as *Letters, Numbers, Shapes*, in which players interact by touching the objects on screen. *Musical Teeth* puts kids into a giant mouth to clean the teeth, then continue on to play them like piano keys.

In the future, Dean will put users into more demanding roles, such as historical missions or adventures. "One way to look at InVideo is as just another, powerful game platform, with a different interface. Anything you can do on a CD-ROM application or cartridge-based game scenario, with arcade-style graphics or adventure scenarios, we can do with InVideo. Instead of moving a character around, you become the character. We put you inside the game."



WORLDS CHAT PUTS NETTERS IN SPACE

Worlds Chat lets Internet users choose 3-D avatars to represent themselves, as they move through a virtual space station. The chat environment is temporarily free for download (www.kaworlds.com).

It provides a navigation system that lets users move through the artificial setting, as they view each other as three-dimensional photorealistic icons, which may be

human, chess pieces, cartoon characters or fish. They'll be capable of complex motions, such as walking, running, jumping, flying and more.

This is the first product from Worlds, Inc. (a spin-off of Knowledge Adventure, Inc.), but there is more to come. **The Internet Worlds Fair**, coming in October, will be a complete, fully functional entertainment and educational environment using the same technology.

DEALS

NBC formed a new unit, NBC Digital Publishing, to turn out 10 CDs in the next 18 months based on information from their broadcasts. ... Virgin Interactive Entertainment bought a piece of Ron Spitzer's

Northstar Studios, and will publish six Northstar titles for the Sony PlayStation. ... VIE will distribute Xatrix's titles, including *Cyberia 2*. ... Viacom is taking over management of Discovery Zone's playrooms. ...

Paul Allen just bought an interest in 3-D/EYE, a company now working on a 3-D application for Windows '95. ... Interactive Magic made an agreement with Alliance to publish its new sub sim, *War Patrol*. ... A new Windows '95 software development kit from Microsoft will make game design better; it includes a code that lets the hardware display 70 frames of animation per second. ...

Interplay signed a deal for the next four games developed by Parallax (the company that developed *Descent*). ... Thanks to a distribution expansion, Sanctuary Woods games now go to 23 countries. ... Interplay will develop games for the Sony PlayStation. ... The game rights for the upcoming movie *Waterworld* went to Interplay. ... Twentieth Century Fox will market Magnet's titles worldwide. ... Ten major companies, including Philips NV, Sony of Japan, IBM, Mitsubishi, Mitsumi, Matsushita, Hewlett-Packard and others, agreed on the format for erasable CDs, to reach market early in 1996.

PAUL ALLEN BUYS STAKE IN PRECISION

Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen paid \$5 million for 10 percent of St. Petersburg, FL-based Precision Systems Inc. PS1 develops software for interactive voice, data and video technologies, such as voice-activated dialing and debit phone card services, for telecommunications companies.

Roy Speer, founder of Home Shopping Network, and Allen are the largest shareholders.

CONTESTS

Compton's NewMedia is giving away Fender guitars as part of their three-way promotion for **Rock 'N' Roll Your Own**. Purchasers who find a gold disc are instant winners, and there also will be a random drawing. A talent contest will reward the best musical presentations prepared with the software.

Actor Alan Thicke is the spokesman for Epson's Children's Computer Creativity contest with children's museums. Epson donated Home Stations to 18 museums. Kids create art on their own computers or by visiting the museums. Winners get Epson equipment.

The participating children's museums are in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, L.A., Mesa, Miami, NYC, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa and Washington, D.C.

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DREAMWORKS GETS CASH

One World Media Corp., which includes Miky Lee and Jay Lee, grandchildren of Samsung's founder, will invest \$300 million in DreamWorks, the company formed by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen. This makes One World the largest outside investor.

DreamWorks is obtaining \$1 billion in additional financing from varied sources. Spielberg, Katzenberg and Geffen put up \$100 million between them for 67 percent stake, while other investors are putting in a combined \$900 million for 33 percent. This includes \$500 million from Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

TOP CD-ROM March 1995

This list, prepared by PC Data, is based on units sold in over 4500 stores.

1. *Myst* (MPC/Mac), Broderbund
2. *D/Zone Collector's Edition* (MS-DOS), Wizard Works
3. *Doom II* (MPC), GT Interactive

Myst settles in for another month; *Doom II* drops a notch and *D/Zone C.E.* ups 12 places.

PBS TO GO ON-LINE

MCI Communications Corp. will spend at least \$15 million over five years to bring Public Broadcasting Service programs to the Internet, on-line services and CD-ROM.

RUSSIAN TECHS HELP NAB BOMB SUSPECT

A criminal analysis program developed by Wayne Norris, Typhoon Software's vice president of science and technology, and recently upgraded by a team of programmers in St. Petersburg, Russia, was instrumental in the arrest of Timothy McVeigh, a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing.

Sister company Typhoon Technologies has put into commercial circulation Russian military explosive detection technology for luggage handling locations as in airports.

Philip Myers, Typhoon president, said the two companies demonstrate "the very real benefits possible from American/Russian cooperation."

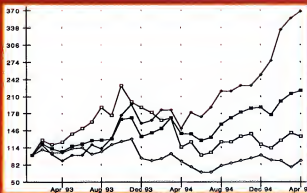
Russian programming via Typhoon Software is also behind children's educational software from Great Wave Software and Image Smith's *Snoopy* screen savers.

CYBERSTOCKS WATCH

The Electronic Games index rose 2.9 percent in April, the fourth consecutive increase this year. Performance varies by sector, with retail stocks staging the biggest rally in recent memory (up more than 15 percent), accompanied by a modest rise in PC-oriented companies (+3.4 percent). Offsetting this strength was a 5 percent dip in cartridge publishers' prices. In general, investors began to fret about the normal summertime slowdown in retail software sales, which finally are catching up with some of the recently explosive PC stocks. Retail stocks were stronger because of continuing high sales rates for PC hardware, and optimism that recent price reductions by Intel on Pentium chips would sustain the trend. Share prices were also affected by continuing expectations about E's: 1) Will hardware prices on new game platforms inhibit the installed base possibilities (and hence revenue potential of publishers)? 2) Will demand revive sometime this year for 16-Bit carts, reversing the serious negative comparisons? 3) Will some of the heat come off the PC stocks as the new game platforms gain notoriety?

Leading the entire lot was Comp USA, whose shares rose 36 percent on better-than-expected sales and earnings increases. This stock has more than doubled off its base of under \$10 during the last 12 months. Second-place honors went to America OnLine, the price for which rose almost 25 percent. Egghead also posted an impressive gain of 12 percent, after two months of lower share prices. Alias Research posted a gain of 6.6 percent, while 3DO lifted 2.9 percent on the latest of rumors about strategic partners. Electronic Arts rose 1.7 percent, reflecting a strong month-end rally prompted by better-than-expected reported earnings on April 27. Finally, Davidson rose 1.5 percent, sustaining the move in March brought about by the Toys 'R Us/Davidson/Mattel distribution agreement.

Despite overall index strength, losers actually outnumbered winners by 10 to 7. The biggest loss went to shareholders of Toy Headquarters (-24 percent) after the report of first-quarter losses. Funco dropped 21 percent, reflecting eroding consumer interest in 16-Bit games. Creative Technology was off 18 percent on concerns about lower earnings as the upgrade cycle for soundboards begins to wane. Ackalm shares gave up almost 14 percent during the month because of the slow sellthrough of NBA Jam: TE at retail. Shares of NeoStar declined 13.3 percent in sympathy with lower cartridge sales, while Sierra was off 14 percent of seasonal reasons. Broderbund's stock eroded 5 percent, largely because of cautious comments by management about growth rates in the second half of the current fiscal year.



John Taylor is an interactive entertainment industry analyst with Portland, OR-based Arcadia Investment Corporation.

DUAL-LAYER CDS WITH 10 TIMES THE DATA GET TOP SUPPORT

Philips Electronics and Sony Corporation introduced a dual-layer, high-density multimedia CD format that can hold up to 7.4 Gigabytes of information on one side of a 120 mm (4 3/4 inch) disc. That's more than 10 times the capacity of the current CD format, and enough for up to 4 1/2 hours of video on one side.

Both companies' entertainment divisions plan to make movies and other full-length video productions available on the new format. Major CD-ROM manufacturers including Acer Peripherals, Alps, JVC, Mitsumi, Ricoh, Teac and

Warnes Peripherals have also endorsed the new format, as have Aiwa, Bang and Olafson, Grundig, Magnavox and Marantz, large, top-ranking home entertainment manufacturers.

CD media producers can reportedly successfully replicate the discs at costs very similar to those of current CDs with only minor modifications to their existing facilities. There is also an 80 mm (3 1/8 inch) minidisc version that will hold up to 2.6 GB, and both sizes can be produced in a single-layer format, which holds just half the information.



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CYBERWATCH

Turbo-Charge our Network!

Anyone who has tried surfing the Net or the Web knows that surfing is the wrong word. Try *paddle-boarding*. Sure, the Internet is interactive, compelling, and deep. But it's also *slow*....it will be years before we'll be able to zap through the Net with the speed of a TV remote. Until then....keep waiting."

—Albert Kim, "Cyberspace Inveigher"
Entertainment Weekly (5/5/95)

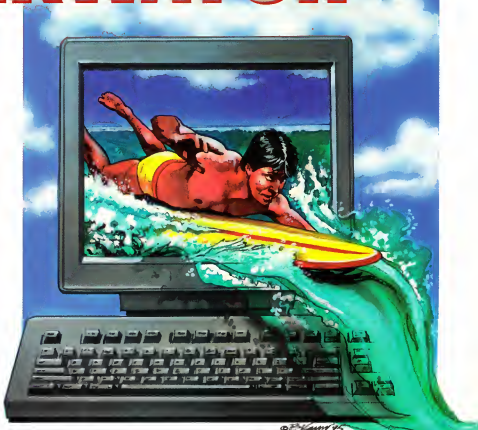
The trend for smaller publishers to affiliate with a software giant in hopes of gaining superior distribution seems to be losing steam. More and more often, relationships which are concluded to the tune of popping champagne corks are in the dumper within a year.

The latest dropout from affiliated status is Sanctuary Woods Multimedia, according to the May '95 issue of *CD-ROM Professional*. "In order to directly control the key retail accounts in its expanding North American retail sales organization....[Sanctuary Woods Multimedia] will handle sales internally by adding 14 people to its sales force."

Meanwhile, in the same issue, editor David R. Guenette got philosophical about the media: "Maybe I'm sounding eerily reminiscent of a PBS/BBC person, but frankly, the consumer CD-ROM industry has an all too common propensity to embrace television and movies and popular music as the guides for what we should be publishing. I mean, talk about goals for new media. Just what is our triumph to be? Daisy Duke and Franklin Mint interactive catalogues? Barney's I Love You 2 Karaoke, Billy Carter Screen Saver, Mary Tyler Moore Multimedia Encyclopedia, or Disney's The Return of the Lion King game?"

"Who in the information age will have the time to contemplate the changing seasons, the beauty of nature, the rhythms of our world, while plugged into an artificial electronic world?"

—Jim Owens, "Letters to the Editor"
Time (5/1/95)



"Everybody's trying to jump on computer films," says producer Mace Neufeld, who's preparing to shoot *A Philosophical Investigation*, [a movie] about a serial killer who chooses his victims from a computer database. "They want to step onto the mythical information highway. I just want to know what the speed limit is."

—"News & Notes" *Entertainment Weekly* (4/28/95)

"Cosmology of Kyoto: Tales of the Helan Millennium (Yano Electric Company, Ltd.) "wandering naked and peniless on the wind-scoured plain, I come across the cold, shriveled corpse of some unlucky traveler, his shrunken face a withered rictus of some untold agony, his clothes befoiled, his meager bag of travelling money beside him, useless..."

"Here's one that won't be on Super Nintendo real soon.

"When I saw the first beta of this thing, at the Yano booth, two MacWorlds ago, I was excited; ...here, at last, was something *really* incomprehensible: Literature, society and religion, in fact and cultural myth. Transgression, Purification, and Redemption. Death and Rebirth. And *history*—the very dust and song of the ages.

"(And *all you* wanted to do was zap some Samurai and laugh at badly-translated Japlish. Well, that's occurring a joyful joke on YOU, honorable round-eye!)"

—Chris Hudak, "Gnarly Glimpses of Old Japan" *Mondo 2000* (Winter 1995)

"In a recent interview, Bobby Kotick, Chairman and CEO of Activision, confirmed that the video game business is in turmoil. 'The final demise of the cartridge business is upon us, and none too soon. These cartridges are very expensive to manufacture. And they're huge inventory risks, because (the production cycle takes) 90 days.

"...PC games have a lower cost of goods and shorter lead times of manufacturing."

—Kathleen Doler, "It's Hard Work to Make Play of Computers,"
Investor's Business Daily (4/27/95)


"Forget alt.sex newsgroups: telephony is the killer app that draws the government into regulating the Net as the telcos scream murder and beg for relief."

—Chris Clark, "The Internet as Ma Bell," *Wired* (5/95)

by Bill Kunkel and Laurie Yates

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GAME DOCTOR

Behind the Mask!

I have written this column since October 1981. It has appeared in over half a dozen magazines and is, I believe, the most widely recognized Q&A column in the business.

However, if the Doc has learned anything in his years of service to gamers everywhere it's that a) you don't forget players' ongoing gratitude (I still get a Christmas card every year from the little boy who got that joystick lodged in his right nostril.) and b) the world of gaming is constantly changing.

The change that I am discussing here concerns *EG's* new title and new look, which commences next issue. After this issue wraps, *EG* will be gone once again. This time, however, it will be replaced by a robust, saucy simulacrum.

The inheritor of this proud mantle is *Fusion*. You know about fusion—things come together and make a big boom or

something scientific like that. It also implies that sometimes elements are merged and new entities are created. This is a lot like evolution, except that most magazines don't start the process as single-celled sea creatures.

In any case, the result of this new evolution will be the transformation of "Game Doctor" into a new column dubbed "Why?" This column will share page space with the letter column, while the lovely Joyce Worley will fill the information gap with "Three Questions" asked of industry movers and shakers.

As for me, I have decided that it is time to shed the mask and stand up under my real name. That's right, I will hereafter be known as The Columnist Formerly Known as the Game Doctor! No, that's been done. Maybe I should go for the single-name trip, like Cher, Madonna, and Flea. So from now on,

I'm just "Game."

"Yo! You game?" I can hear them ask. I can see my answer getting me in a lot of trouble.

Okay, so how about we do it the adult, mature way? It's not my style, but what the flip, a Doc's gotta do what a Doc's gotta do. So from now on, I will stand before you as: Bill "the Game Doctor" Kunkel. This way, I retain rights to the pen name, and there is no longer any question as to the Doc's true identity.

It's almost a relief. You guys are getting smarter; you were figuring it all out. The jig was up. So now, like John Mellencamp reclaiming his roots, Bill Kunkel is here to answer a few questions:

Q: I'm having a weird problem: I own the regular Genesis version of *Virtua Racing*.

EARTH IS URTH.



MAN IS GRUB.



It works just fine when I run it through the Genesis, but when I try to run it through the 32X module, it won't play. I have called Sega and they say it should be no problem. What up?

Jason Walker
Las Vegas, NV

A: Yeah, Jase, Sega told us the same thing and our three versions of the game don't run through the 32X either (though they run fine without it). So, although it's a pain to take out the 32X and replace it, that looks like the only answer.

James Catalano, #1 Game Doc Q-Man for '95, contributes the info that SMS games can be played using both the power base converter (PBC) and the 32X—but only on the original Genesis model. He says: "Run the Genesis output through both the RF and A/V ports. All you'll need is an RF switch-box and a cable with a male RCA phono jack at both ends. Assuming the 32X is set up, attach the RF box to your TV and one end of the cable into the switchbox and the other end into the RF port on the Genesis. To use the PBC, just unplug the 32X power pack and remove it from the cartridge slot. You don't have to remove the metal plates used by the 32X to hold the cartridge bay doors open. You may have to tune your TV set to get the RF signal if the picture is scrambled." We submitted this document to

Sega and were told: "Yea, it works." So I guess you've done it again, dude!

Q: Game Doctor! How could you give the lowdown on *Killer Instinct* and *Ultra 64* when you haven't seen neither [sic] the home version nor the console?! Take a good look, Nintendo is a billion dollar company with no debts. Making them liable to lose a couple of dollars to meet the \$250 price range by launch. You don't know what Nintendo is capable of! Keep in mind, come E' in L.A., you will be eating your words and apologizing to all Nintendo freaks such as myself! I suggest you lay off the cocaine and Tommy Tallarico's soundtrack CD and everything will be all right! See you at E'!

G-Force Fanzine
Att: Herman McClain
Van Nuys, CA

A: Don't hold back, Herman. Share your pain. Seriously, dude, all I said was that *Nintendo admitted that its coin-op Killer Instinct was not running on an Ultra 64*. Now correct me if I'm wrong, but I was under the impression that giving readers "the lowdown" was my job.

As for seeing me at E'—not if I see you first!

On that happy note, the Doc is gonna wrap up this month's package and deliver it. But to celebrate our changeover, to com-

memorate the final installment of the Game Doctor in *EG*, I thought I'd stage a little contest with a special prize selected from the Doc's own personal collection of cool game junk. The two-part question is: Before the shakeout, Atari published a 2600 game called *Yar's Revenge*. Question one (easy part): What coin-op was the game based on? Question two: Who was "Yar" named after?

Now be good to one another, and remember, whatever name I appear under, my primary concern is providing good, useful information. So keep sending those Qs to:

Bill Kunkel (Game Doctor)
330 S Decatur, Suite 158,
Las Vegas, NV 89107
e-mail: GameNurse@aol.com

Aloha, friends, with special thanks to Seth Mendelsohn, Eric Yohe, Robb Alvy, Mark Miller, Laurie Yates (current Game Nurse), Game Nurses from the past, JP Withers, Rich Heimlich, Barry Friedman, Dwight Okahara, Bruce Carver, Steve Witzel, Angie Niehoff, Russell Lieblich, Don Daglow, Scott Orr, Rob Holmes, Dave Dempsey, Billy Pidgeon, Dan Feinstein, Laurie Thornton, Nicole Noland, Linda Blanchard, CJ Welch, Terry Tang, Richard Lindner, Eileen Tanner, John Skruch and the dozens of industry friends who have helped out—which was more often than you probably guessed.

THE GODS ARE ANGRY.



RAGE IS HOME.



(PRIMAL RAGE, COMING TO YOUR HOUSE AUGUST 25, 1995.)

Sega™ Genesis™
Sega™ Game Gear™
Super NES™
Nintendo® Game Boy®
PC-CD ROM



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ZOMBIES: FROM LEFT JOANNA
ALEXANDER, RANDY JONES, LISA
LIEDGREN AND MARK LONG

by Steve Kent

ZOMBIE POPULATION GROWTH

Seattle's
ZOMBIE Is Poised
to Bring Virtual
Reality to the
Mass Market

Photography by Debra LaCoppola

ZOMBIE AWAKENS

Seattle's

Pioneer Square is a collection of every strata of society. Intersected by Yesler Street, where the term skid row originated, Pioneer Square is a mecca for Washington's art collectors and homeless alike. In this divergent neighborhood, Aldus Corporation, creator of PageMaker, is situated across the street from rare book and antique dealers.

Zombie Virtual Reality Entertainment, a new computer game manufacturer with an eye on the future, is located on Pioneer Square in a brick building with a sign that says "State Hotel—Rooms 75 cents." Zombie represents the cutting edge of game technology—high-speed simulations that incorporate networking and virtual reality.



ZOMBIES! From left Janet Galore, Linley Storm, Randy Jones, Roland Barker, Kim Collimer and Guy Hundere

Zombie's founders Joanna Alexander and Mark Long bring unique views and experiences to the world of gaming. First of all, they are not computer programmers. The two are veterans of the famous Sarnoff Research Center, founded by David Sarnoff, the founder of RCA. Alexander was one of the first members of the Sarnoff Synthetic Environments Group, which conducted pioneering research in the field of virtual reality. Long, who headed the group's business development, came to Sarnoff after working with the Army's Institute for Advanced Technology.

Alexander and Long's experiences more than qualified them to move into game development, even if the antiseptic environment of the Sarnoff Research Center sounds like an odd place to start a game company. As consultants with ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, they worked on what critics might call the world's largest video game.

"We had a project with ARPA to develop a virtual-reality debriefing environment for U.S. Navy fighter pilots who were learning air-to-air combat skills," Alexander explains. "It was really a fun project—part of a larger project that was supposed to help give F-14 pilots another mechanism for training that was much less expensive than actually going up in an actual F-14."

Alexander's team developed flight recorders that monitored each pilot's performance and allowed their simulated flights to be played back and observed from several angles. They also converted the system from four-color vector graphics to shaded polygonal graphics.

"I never appreciated the importance of what we were doing until I saw one particular mission," says Alexander. "There was this new pilot who had it all figured out. I mean he was an F-14 pilot after all, so he just knew everything in the world there was to know."

"On this one mission, he was flying at a bogey and he was supposed to pull up, but he was too young to know that an F-14 doesn't handle like a car. When he pulled up, his jet strayed forward, but he couldn't see it from his angle so he thought he'd done everything right. All they had to do was replay the mission from the bogey's perspective (with the F-14 sliding belly first into the enemy jet), and he got the

idea pretty quickly."

The Navy project was so successful that the Synthetic Environment Group was contracted to create a similar system for teaching Army aviators to fly Apache helicopters.

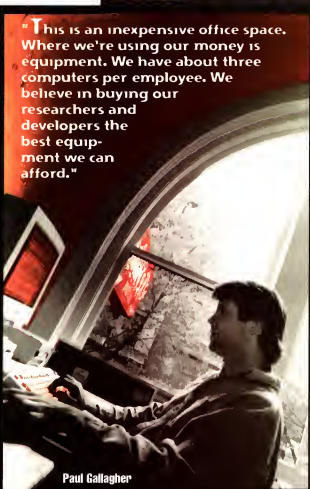
The experience was a valuable starting ground for Alexander and Long. Though their company has no plans for releasing realistic flight simulations, they say their background shows up in odd ways throughout their products. "Network training translates well into network gaming," says Alexander.

Long and Alexander decided to form their own company when an outside interest hired the Sarnoff group to help develop a virtual-reality headset. "We were introduced to the electronic entertainment industry and we were really astonished. We liked their lifestyle, and we were attracted to the idea that a company started with such a small initial investment, with such small staff and such low overhead could be a serious player," explains Alexander. "Some of the people were complete knuckleheads, and they were running businesses and doing just fine."

"We had a project with ARPA to develop a virtual-reality debriefing environment for U.S. Navy fighter pilots who were learning air-to-air combat skills," Alexander explains.



"This is an inexpensive office space. Where we're using our money is equipment. We have about three computers per employee. We believe in buying our researchers and developers the best equipment we can afford."



Paul Gallagher



JOANNA ALEXANDER

ARM FORCES

"I found that a really great way of winning arguments was to challenge them to an arm-wrestling contest. Once you've challenged a guy to an arm-wrestling contest, he's already lost. If he says no, he's the biggest jerk in the world. If he says yes and I beat him, he's going to have to go home and shoot himself. If he beats me, what did he expect? I'm a girl."

"Arm wrestling was also a pretty good ice breaker, and I'm a good arm wrestler. I'm tall and I have long arms and leverage makes up for a lot."

"The most memorable case was at Fort Rutger. I wanted to use this pool table and there was some arrogant pilot who decided I couldn't. I think he was drunk or he wanted to be annoying, and he said he would arm wrestle me for the table, so I said, 'Great, let's go buddy.'"

"I beat him, and he made up all of these excuses and said that I cheated. It was so pathetic."

"Once you've challenged a guy to an arm-wrestling contest, he's already lost. If he says no, he's the biggest jerk in the world. If he says yes and I beat him, he's going to have to go home and shoot himself. If he beats me, what did he expect? I'm a girl."

ZOMBIE BEGINS

"The objective of this company is not to build an empire," says Long. "I compare the state of our industry to the early days of film. In the early days, film houses did everything. They turned the crank on the camera, they developed the film themselves. Everything was in-house.

"As the game industry grows and breaks apart, houses like ours will become strictly design and development houses. That's what we want to be."

Having decided to start their own company, Alexander and Long began

searching for investors. The Sarnoff Center owns a small piece of their company, but their major backers are N. J. Nicholas, former co-CEO of Time Warner, Inc. and Michael Tannen, the founder and president of Kennevik Media Ventures.

According to Alexander, she and Long decided to move to Seattle after considering several locations, including San Diego and Monterey, CA. "We eventually chose Seattle because it's such a target-rich environment for programmers and multimedia specialists. If you're a big company, you can sit in Peoria, IN, and people will come to you. If you're a little guy and you care about the people you're going to hire, you should really go where the people are. It's quite interesting; all but one of our 12 employees are from this area."

Admittedly smaller than many competitors and not nearly as rich, Zombie relies on a lean staff and innovative management to create their products. According to Long, they have arranged each project so that all the participants have a personal stake in its success. "The producer and technical lead get a percentage of the gross profit of each project."

"Mark and I don't take profit from the individual products," adds Alexander.

"We're also careful how we allocate money," says Long. "This is an inexpensive office space. Where we're using our money is equipment. We have about three computers per employee. We believe in buying our researchers and developers the best equipment we can afford."

"We also broker space for time," says Long. "We bring in outside talent and let them use our space in exchange for work. Space entails e-mail, copiers, faxes, receptionist. ..."

"They can use our bathroom too," adds Alexander. "We're nice guys."

"We have them under contract for at least 30 percent of their available time," says Long. "Not only do they bring in some of their own equipment, but they bring special talents."

MARK LONG

"The objective of this company is not to build an empire. I compare the state of our industry to the early days of film. In the early days, film houses did everything. They turned the crank on the camera, they developed the film themselves. Everything was in-house."



ICE AND FIRE:


Zombie's managerial philosophy and technical know-how mean little. The company's future depends on products. In order to survive, Zombie must produce outstanding games.

Zombie's first two games should establish the company as one of the best new publishers in years. One of the games, titled *Ice and Fire*, is the co-creation of Zombie and the Russian development team that created *Tetris*. "We're executive producing this game," says Long. "The real development is being done in Moscow."

Asked how a small start-up company like Zombie attracted the attention of the world-famous team that created *Tetris*, Joanna Alexander smiles. "Alexey (Pajitnov) and Vladimir (Pokhilko) came to us. We met them when we were doing research, and we became friends."

"They're actually scientists, you know," adds Long. "Alexey was working at the Moscow Academy of Science when he created *Tetris*."

Ice and Fire is a science-fiction game that Alexander describes as "a giant game of Concentration combined with an action game." The idea behind the game is that a colony based on a giant



"Ice and Fire is a science-fiction game that Alexander describes as "a giant game of Concentration combined with an action game.""

ICE STATION ZOMBIE

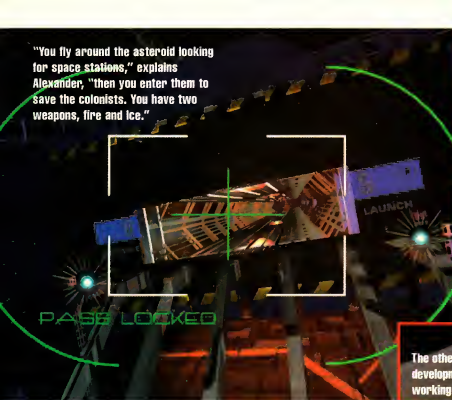
"By making Ice and Fire about saving people, rather than just killing aliens, it adds that little something that's missing in so many games."

With the man behind *Tetris*, Alexey Pajitnov, in your corner, it's likely the new title *Ice and Fire* will establish Zombie as a premier gaming company.




Zombie's Ice and Fire team:
Roland Barker and
Kim Collmer





"You fly around the asteroid looking for space stations," explains Alexander, "then you enter them to save the colonists. You have two weapons, fire and ice."



The other half of the famous Russian development team, Vladimir Pokhilko, is working to make *Ice and Fire* a hit.

asteroid is attacked by aliens. The aliens suddenly materialized everywhere so that the only way to save the colonists was to freeze the entire asteroid. For years, the colonists and the invading aliens have existed side by side, frozen in huge cubes of ice.

Players assume the role of a hero sent to save the colonists years after the attack. "You fly around the asteroid looking for

space stations," explains Alexander, "then you enter them to save the colonists. You have two weapons, fire and ice."

Once you enter the space station, *Ice and Fire* looks like *Doom* in a refrigerator. You explore nine stations. When you find ice, you thaw it. If it holds colonists, you rescue them. If it has aliens, you must very quickly

refreeze them until you locate stronger weapons that allow you to fight.

"Not all of the aliens look like aliens," says Long.

"The hard part is going back through and remembering which ice has colonists and which ice has aliens," says Alexander.

"Vladimir explained the points of addiction that made *Tetris* so popular before telling us about *Ice and Fire*," says Long. "The two things that make *Tetris* so addictive are the feeling of unfinished action and the visible time pressure. *Ice and Fire* adds a third point of addiction that I didn't understand until Vladimir explained it. You unfreeze characters who are sympathetic, people that you're helping. You have the sense that you have someone's welfare at stake.

"If I tell you that I have to walk down to the garage to get my keys, you won't think anything about it," says Long. "But if I told you earlier that there's a murderer in the streets and he's after bald white guys, you'll worry about me. My adventure takes on a whole new meaning.

"By making *Ice and Fire* about saving people, rather than just killing aliens, it adds that little something that's missing in so many games."

Ice and Fire will be available for Macintosh and IBM compatible





Swarm of *Locus*:
Christine McSavran,
Mike Dussault
and Janet Galore

Locus

computers by Christmas.

Zombie will also release *Locus*, the first network compatible virtual-reality game for home use, by Christmas. It's a no-holds-barred sports game combining elements of soccer and demolition derby. Competitors fly futuristic high-speed hovercraft in spherical arenas as they scoop up balls and shoot them in their opponents' chutes while they attempt to protect their own goals.

One of the disorienting aspects of *Locus* is that the hovercraft can fly right up the rounded walls of the arena and along the ceiling. "We wanted to create an infinite arena," says Alexander. "That's why we chose the spherical shape."

The advantage to wearing a head-mounted display is that it allows you to look quickly in any direction chosen. Opponents can attack from above, below, or either side.

"One of the problems with VR translations of *Doom* and other games is that once players get used to the head-mounted display, they tend to only look straight ahead. There's nothing to force them to check over their shoulder, so it's like playing with a regular monitor on your head," says Long.

"By adding 3-D audio, we give very strong cues as to where your opponents are going to be. We will be taking the player's eyes and ears for a ride!"

Even though few consumers currently have head-mounted virtual-reality displays, Alexander and Long expressed confidence in their product. "With our backgrounds, we know what research is capable of creating next. We're not just designing for the technology that's available today," says Alexander.



One of the disorienting aspects of *Locus* is that the hovercraft can fly right up the rounded walls of the arena and along the ceiling. "We wanted to create an infinite arena," says Alexander. "That's why we chose the spherical shape."



"Three years from now virtual reality will be a very strong niche. The peripherals you see on the market today will shake out. They'll be cheaper and better. Owning a VR headset will be like having a good joystick," adds Long.

"You don't need a VR headset to play **Locus**," Alexander points out. "Even played on a standard monitor, **Locus** is a very good game."

ZPG:

Among the projects that Zombie has slated for release in 1996, one adventure game stands out for its artistic and innovative graphics. **Zero Population Growth (ZPG)** features the threatening and dramatic animations of Aidan Hughes, whose

**The dramatic art of Aidan Hughes for
Zombie's Zero Population Growth.**

work has appeared on MTV.

Set in a bleak Orwellian future, ZPG is the story of a despotic regime's attempt to control world population through the creation of a race of super-human exterminators. When one of their exterminators proves to be too powerful, his creators try to destroy him. Their failure turns him into a dangerous and unlikely hero.

The story behind this game sounds fairly standard, but Hughes' graphics give it a haunting edge that goes far beyond anything on the market today.



ZPG's Guy Hunderie and Linley Storm



internet • NUKE interface

**THE
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FORUM
ON THE
WORLD
WIDE
WEB**



FEATURED GAMES FOR JUNE:



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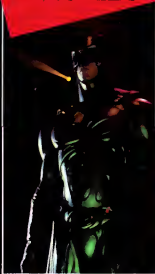
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DETONATION BEGINS...

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LET'S



by the editors of *Electronic Games*

THE STRIKE IS OVER...

SWING!

The wait is over for publishers and players

"Baseball Fever—Catch It." That's the slogan of Major League Baseball, the banner under which franchise owners sell licenses and promote their products. It's a catchy line, but it took on a special meaning for software publishers. The interactive electronic entertainment industry caught baseball fever, all right, and it nearly died of the experience.

The strike couldn't have come at a worse time for interactive publishers. It hit suddenly—and for many unexpectedly—just when the industry was tooling up an unusual number of baseball titles.

Market conditions have rarely been more favorable for simulations of our national pastime. Among the key positives:

1. A great season. Nothing pushes popularity like a lot of great on-the-field action, and baseball had it aplenty in 1994. Publishers anticipated even more media excitement for later in the season if Matt Williams got close to Maris, and Tony Gwynn looked like the first .400 hitter in 53 years.
2. CD-ROM. Suddenly, drives went from being a curiosity to commonplace. The explosive market made a multimedia baseball title a must for every wide-awake software company—and a lot of the designers and developers found the new technology very stimulating.
3. The console revolution. It is axiomatic in the business that every new platform must have a representative software selection. That means a solid entry in every entertainment subcategory, from fighting game to baseball. With PlayStation, Sega Saturn, 3DO, Jaguar and Ultra 64 here or on the horizon, few console-oriented software makers failed to include at least one baseball game in their 1995/early 1996 plans.
4. The software cycle. As in every fashion business, products move into the market in cycles. We're just coming out of an extended football-basketball boom, so it was time to return to baseball.

Then came the strike. The immediate effect was that sales of virtually every existing baseball game slumped worse than Darryl Strawberry in July. "Fans were so angry and disappointed about the season that they didn't want to play the games, either," admits the president of a leading sports simulation outfit.

One shining exception was **Ken Griffey Baseball**. Even as the 16-Bit category crumbled last winter, it held up as one of the hottest cartridge titles. It did only about 20 percent as much business as **Donkey Kong Country**, but nothing else did much better.

Scarier even than the strike was the threat of the replacement players. SAI, MicroSports, Sony Imagesoft, Sierra On-Line, Electronic Arts and other manufacturers of high-end baseball simulations held their breath when it seemed possible that the owners would treat us to a season of has-beens and never-wases.

No one knows if the major league clubs were serious about using the no-names. They fired them quickly enough when the chance came to call into question their resolve to proceed with a season on that basis.

Few game industry executives questioned the likely result if the "real" players didn't come back. Many would've preferred another year of strike, because they believed that consumers wouldn't buy a game featuring these transitory athletes.

Replacement players spelled severe trials for a category increasingly dependent on realism. Nobody cared about the replacements, software publishers acknowledged, so who would pay for a game based on them?

Game Delayed

Baseball sim companies got two big breaks, just when things looked darkest. The first was the decision by several console companies to go slow on the introduction of 32- and 64-Bit machines. If relentless rivalry had driven Sony, Sega and Nintendo to release earlier, companies would've faced a dilemma.

As it turned out, companies don't have to worry about the U64 at all this season, and the need to get a PSX baseball game out before the all-star break is also minimal. Sega Saturn's unexpectedly early release put a rush on supporting discs, but the installed base won't be significant until after the 1995 baseball season ends.

Look for a flood of late summer console releases as publishers catch up after thawing out "go slow" projects. Some companies will skip in-season release entirely, and instead aim to be in the first batch of baseball titles for the super platforms sometime in late fourth quarter 1995 or first-half 1996.

Microsoft Baseball, are nearing completion at Stormfront under the watchful eye of Don Daglow. Dave Holt is ready to unveil **MicroSports Baseball**, a CD-ROM *tour de force* that will benefit from Maxis distribution.

Miller Associates has come up with the single biggest advance in computer baseball this year. The new version of **Baseball for Windows**, based on the



Calling Computer Coaches

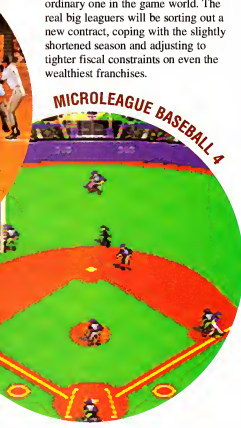
Mid-season releases of computer baseball sims will be plentiful this year. SAI, formerly known as MLSA Associates, will be bringing out a new version of its popular **MicroLeague Baseball**. A semiconnected pair of games, **Tony LaRussa** and

APBA Baseball board game, features wall-to-wall commentary. With the screen dark, it's like listening to an authentic game on the radio.

Miller also has one of the best software accessories, a baseball encyclopedia. It's great by itself, but it also connects to the baseball game so that users can import any season of any player into the simulation.

The Final Score

It's going to be a strange year for major league baseball—and far from an ordinary one in the game world. The real big leaguers will be sorting out a new contract, coping with the slightly shortened season and adjusting to tighter fiscal constraints on even the wealthiest franchises.



There will be no shortage of new interactive simulations, but gamers will have to be patient about introduction dates. Baseball's labor woes surrounded many projects with enough uncertainty to add at least a couple of months to almost every promised release.

Will these games be worth the perhaps long wait? Expectations undoubtedly play a pivotal role in answering that question. Fans who are satisfied with games that give more and better without doing anything boldly innovative will be very pleased. But though the CD-ROM titles will be impressive, those who want to take baseball simulations to a higher standard probably won't get their heart's desire until spring 1996.

Baseball's Unanswered Questions

The baseball strike hurt electronic sports sim publishers in the pocket-book, but it had an even stronger effect on millions of die-hard baseball enthusiasts. *Seasons Interruptus* turned joy to tears in an instant, as fans watched baseball's cherished continuity vanish in a cloud of charges and counter-charges.

Most fans agree that the 1994 season was shaping up to be one of the most significant and interesting in recent memory. The strike cut it off in the heat of summer, just as fans became aware of some potentially record-breaking individual and team performances.

The strike robbed fans of the pleasure of the chance to see hardball history made. Fans got the build-up, but not the pay-off. The year will go down as a might-have-been, a source of constant debates during long winter months between actual baseball.

Fans may never know the ultimate answers to 1994's riddles, but they can have a lot of fun experimenting with those tantalizing questions. Sophisticated baseball simulations make it possible for electronic gamers to do their own research and arrive at some theories about how things might have gone if the players and owners had bargained instead of battled.

To get everyone started, the *EG* staff set around a genuine, certified Hot Stove and came up with these baseball questions that can be answered with popular stat simulation baseball games such as *MicroLeague Baseball '95* (SAI/PC CD-ROM), *Front Page Sports Baseball* (Sierra/PC), *MicroSports Baseball* (Microsports/PC CD-ROM), *Tony LaRussa CD* (Electronic Arts/PC CD-ROM) and *APBA Major League Players Baseball* (Miller Associates/PC).

1. Who won the divisions, the league championship and the World Series? That's the most basic question. The last missed World Series was roughly 90 years ago. Armchair managers can approach this question in several ways, depending on available time and degree of commitment. A full-dress season replay (or several season replays using quick play features included in many games) can generate the balance of the pennant races and the likely outcome of post-

season series. Those with less time can start with the teams that would have qualified at the time of the strike and work from there.

2. Would Barry Bonds have won another MVP? After a somewhat slow start, San Francisco's blue chip belter started hitting for power and average. Could his surge, coupled with Jeff Bagwell's injury, have allowed him to overtake rivals and win yet another MVP award, his third in four years?

3. How low would Gary Maddux's ERA have been? In a hitter's year, Maddux flirted with the best mark since Gibson and Koufax. Many feel that the ball was livelier, and the strikezone smaller, at the start of the year than at mid-summer. Could Maddux, in the heat of a close pennant race, have lowered his earned run average still further?

4. Could someone have broken Roger Maris' single season home run record? Maris' mark, asterisk and all, was in deep jeopardy. Bill James employed a computer simulation to suggest that Matt Williams, for one, could have hit more than 61. Other analysts feel Ken Griffey, Jr. also had a chance. Playing out the Giant and Mariner schedules from the point of suspension will shed some light.

5. Could Tony Gwynn have hit .400? The season cut short Gwynn's bid to be the first .400 hitter since Ted Williams in 1941, and he ended the season with a .394 figure. There was plenty of time for him to start a new hitting streak. Playing the Padres' missing games on computer or console gives him the opportunity to do it.

6. How spectacular was Albert Belle? The occasionally moody slugger might have recorded one of the best all-around hitting performances in the entire history of baseball if he had those strike-aborted games. Could Belle have hit .370 with 50+ homers, 150+ RBIs, 140+ runs scored and 55+ doubles? Cleveland fans will think so, but the gamers have a special way to test that opinion.

These are just a few of the most pertinent baseball questions. Every fan can come up with a few that relate to their favorite, or most hated, team. Thanks to electronic sports simulations, they can now study these fascinating situations from the inside.

by John Wesley Hardin

BASEBALL HEAVEN

What to look for when you're not busy playing or watching baseball

Verily the strike did end and lo! the gates of baseball heaven opened and the carts did issue forth.

Much to the relief of baseball lovers and baseball game makers alike, the baseball strike came to an end before all enthusiasm for the sport could be quashed. Game companies are pushing the carts out the door as fast as they are ready to go, to capitalize on the resumption of

the season. Here's what *EG* gleaned from the first half-dozen to cross the threshold since the strike ended.

What do baseball carts for 1995 hold? About 700 players. It takes a lot of money to get both of the big-league licenses, and only the richest companies can afford the luxury of having the MLB and the MLBPA tags. The most common license is the Major League Baseball Players Association because it's not as pricey as the Major League Baseball license. Hence the majority of the games have the real players in oddly or blandly named teams. **World Series**

Baseball is the only game with both licenses, another reason it stands out above the others in the pack.

Digitized speech isn't just a luxury any more, as all the games had some level of digitized voice. Actual good

SUPER RBI

TECMO'S SUPER BASEBALL



digitized play by play seems less common however; only **Super RBI** and **World Series Baseball** were above average.

Baseball from the catcher's perspective is the rule in this year's games. Low and from behind the batter, most of the '95 games have the player batting and pitching from this angle, the point being to make the batter as large as possible. In some of the carts, the batter takes up an entire fifth of the screen from top to bottom. **Tecmo's Super Baseball** is the only one that doesn't follow this formula, choosing instead a higher point of view behind the batter. Their cart is the only one that allows the player to switch on the fly to a behind-the-pitcher point of view.

It seems that the trend is actually away from roto-scoped actors and more toward drawn, bitmapped characters. The consensus seems to be that if it can't be done right, it shouldn't be done at all. Only a couple of carts bothered with hyper-realistic characters (see sidebar). The others favored hand drawn athletes, and none are cursed by inferior animation.

Three play modes seems to be the absolute minimum this season, and the better carts have the regular three plus one or two special games. **World Series Baseball** (again) comes through with Exhibition, Playoffs, Batting Practice and two different Home Run Derbies.

The current crop of games makes the most of baseball fans' tendency to be grandstand managers. Now, hardball games aren't complete if the player can't at least conduct trades and assemble the ideal, hard-hittin' dream team.

Tecmo's Super Baseball has an option to let players just coach their teams (relieving them of the job of trying to bat, pitch and field) and dictate orders to the athletes.

Technology marches on and next year's baseball games ought to be bigger, better and more realistic than even the worthy titles examined here. Next year's cartridges won't (it is hoped) have the stigma

of a long, long ugly strike to erase, so look for hotter competition as more game makers get back onto the baseball field.

THE CARTS THEMSELVES

The undisputed champion of the console baseball games is **World Series Baseball '95** (Sega/Genesis). As **John Madden Football** is to football sims, so **WSB** is becoming to baseball, mostly because of its flexibility, excellent graphics and lots of clear and varied digitized speech.

WSB offers the best combination of real players and major league teams. Fans will find teams of all-time great players, multi-player leagues and simply the best in 16-Bit baseball action.

Tecmo Super Baseball (Tecmo/Genesis) Three game modes and three levels of difficulty make for a flexible game. The Superstar game lets gamers assemble their dream teams and face them off against one another. Seasons can be played in regular, reduced or short seasons, perfect for simulating the 1994 season. Players see a picture of the batter and pitcher, and the animation is smooth. While **Super Baseball** is okay, it doesn't stand out from the pack.

The Sporting News Baseball (Hudson Soft/SNES) is a license from *The Sporting News*, a weekly sports rag that has been published continuously for 100 years. Any sport game suffers without pro-announcing, but **SNB** has particularly uninspired digital

speech. On the other hand, **Sporting News'** music is the best of the bunch, the on-screen athletes are big and fluidly animated and the overall graphic presentation is very good. Seasons can be played in four different lengths. An

edit feature changes teams' batting orders and players' names, though with a Major League Players Association license, why would you want to?

Super RBI Baseball (Time Warner Interactive/SNES) has forgone digitized actors for a more cartoonish look. It works, and the result is very appealing.

The obligatory features are here, but there is one intriguing special feature. The **Game Breakers** module is a collection of 17 baseball minigames that present problems for the player to

solve. For example, sudden death pits two teams at the bottom of the ninth, 0-0, one out and one man on base. The player has two batters to make a run and win the game. Other scenarios present more complex situations, and some rely on simple feats of ability (like hitting a Grand Slam) to win. This innovative feature, plus the second best digitized play by play in any baseball cart so far this year, combine to make **Super RBI** a good draft for any baseball lover's library.

RBI Baseball 95 (Time Warner/32X) is another offering from TWI. We're happy to report the only baseball cart

for the 32X is pretty good. Well animated, roto-scoped athletes, full-color backgrounds for all 28 big-league stadiums and an MLBPA license go a long way, and it helps that the game play

is pretty involving. The 32X's increased processing power makes for a somewhat wilier artificial opponent, but a human opponent is still recommended over any game's artificial intelligence.



SPORTING NEWS BASEBALL



An interview with Alexey Pajitnov, the man who created Tetris

The fall of communism in Russia. The breakup of the Soviet Union. Glasnost and perestroika. Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Elections and attempted coups. Through it all, **Tetris** survived and indeed, thrived throughout the world.

So too did its Moscow-born inventor, Alexey Pajitnov, albeit in America. He's lived here for over four years, since Spectrum HoloByte brought him to the U.S. in 1990 after they published **Tetris** for home computers in 1988.

Pajitnov spoke to *Electronic Games* recently about his new projects and experiences in the game industry.

Pajitnov has enjoyed great success in America since the release of **Tetris** for almost every game platform. He did the designs for **Welltris**, **Faces ... Tris III** and **Hatris** (along with his longtime partner and good friend Vladimir Polhilko).

Pajitnov and Polhilko later formed AnimaTek and published **El Fish** through Maxis. AnimaTek will soon publish new titles developed by its sister company (also called AnimaTek) in Russia. Last year, Spectrum HoloByte introduced a new line of action puzzle games endorsed by Pajitnov, the latest of which is **Clockwerx**.

Through all his triumphs in game design and publishing, Pajitnov remains a humble and curious man, fascinated by the many things he's exposed to in America, but "not very concerned about" financial success and material possessions.

Pajitnov's interest in mathematics and

computers goes back to his youth. He wrote a lot of programs during his school years and eventually made his way to the R&D labs at the Computer Center of Moscow Academy of Science. It was there that he developed **Tetris** on an Electronica 60 computer, especially inspired by the puzzle game Pentominoes and other geometric toys. The name **Tetris** came from "tetra," a form of the Greek word for four. Each of the various shapes in **Tetris** is made of exactly four blocks joined in a simple pattern.

When people play **Tetris** for the first time, they are usually amazed both at the game's simplicity and at its ability to hook them for a number of hours. Although the game's sequels are variations of the same theme (falling objects that players must maneuver into patterns to eliminate them from the screen), none are as universally known as **Tetris**.

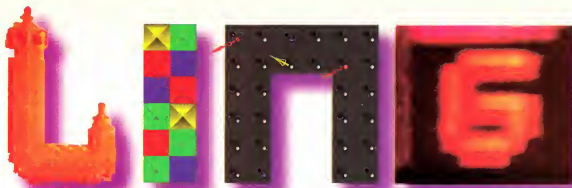
Pajitnov commented that "puzzle games are very popular right now, and I'm happy that's true because I can now design other types of puzzle games and people will play them."

Although he does not tackle the programming for his games anymore, Pajitnov is still involved in the development of new action puzzle games. He is also involved in the publication through AnimaTek of software programs that he and Polhilko discover abroad and in their native Russia.

Spectrum HoloByte debuted the line of games that all bear the face, name and signature of Pajitnov with **BreakThru**, a challenging game in which the object is to demolish a series of walls of blocks.

BreakThru was later followed by **WildSnake** for video game platforms.





by Russ Ceccola

DEVELOPER

Clockwerx is the latest game endorsed by Pajitnov. Players must maneuver a spinning clock hand from dot to dot on the game screen to an exit dot, all the time avoiding obstacles like bombs, enemy clock hands and acid pools.

Pajitnov typically plays the games he endorses early in the design process and makes suggestions to the developers along the way until he is confident that players will enjoy both the action and the puzzle elements of the final product. "My heart is really in puzzles. I like everything that uses the mind," he affirmed.

Pajitnov remains humble, which may be surprising in light of a line of computer and video games that link him to each and every product. He strikes those who meet him as quiet and unassuming, yet also funny, friendly and creative. "In Russia, computers are very expensive, so not too many people play computer games. But the Game Boy is popular, so people know of Tetris and me through that. If people don't recognize me, I don't mind," he remarked.

Many advances in technology have taken place while Pajitnov worked on his various game designs. "Technology does not directly affect the development of puzzle games, but it does increase the opportunities for people to play them," he explained.

While Pajitnov settled into his life in America, the climate of the software industry changed back home. "I have been open to a lot of different things over here, but professionally I am still growing up. However, it's a very good time for business in Russia and there are many talented people there working on games."

AnimaTek is one way that Pajitnov plans to introduce other Russian talent to

the gaming community. He joked that "the country that I left doesn't exist anymore," but perhaps the new Russia will ultimately be better for Pajitnov and his goals.

Although many players might consider Pajitnov the man most responsible for the craze in puzzle games, he does not just spend his time at his computer or video game machines. His mother wrote for a movie magazine when he was a child; he once watched 50 films during a 10-day period during the Moscow Film Festival with a pass that she gave him.

Pajitnov enjoys simulation games in addition to his beloved puzzles, but also reads books, or rents English and Russian films to relax. Perhaps one day he will be able to translate his interest in motion pictures into multimedia titles. He also plays board games and thought "it was very amazing" when he saw a Russian version of *Monopoly*, the popular game that extols capitalism.

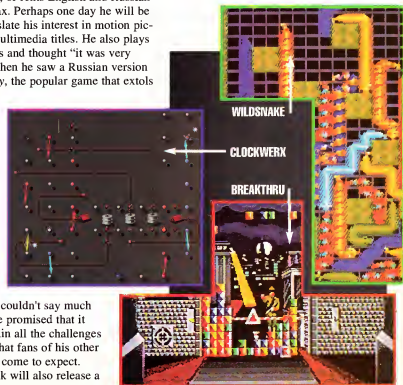
The next project for Pajitnov will be an original design of his own that involves chess pieces. The game is still in development, so he couldn't say much more, but he promised that it would contain all the challenges and action that fans of his other games have come to expect.

AnimaTek will also release a

nature title and then one about dinosaurs. They are not puzzle games, but will instead make use of multimedia to explore those categories in unique ways.

Pajitnov has proven that games can have very simple rules, yet compel players to think intensely about their actions at every minute during the game—thus exercising both their fingers and their minds.

Pajitnov's face on the game box indicates a title that meets these requirements. At the same time, it celebrates a Russian game designer who learned through hard work and creativity what success in America is all about.



THE NET

Adventuring with Modus Operandi

The text adventure game has a long and substantial pedigree. The old game *Adventure* shares the distinction of being one of the first computer games in existence, having gobbled up mainframe clock ticks since the days when the idea of a personal computer was having a dumb terminal on your desk instead of having to work with punched cards.

Infocom, in the early days of the PC revolution, made an entire company out of this type of game. The most popular of their products, the *Zork* series, are the only ones that spring immediately to mind today, but there were many other titles of the text adventure type on the shelves at one point.

But then came *Bard's Tale* and *Ultima*. These graphically oriented interface quest games staked themselves out directly in the center of the territory that text-based games had ruled: the fantasy adventure quest. Cinemaware put the final nail in the coffin.

While there are a few shareware creations still keeping the text-based adventure alive (and some of these efforts are quite good, but that is a subject that deserves its own column), for all intents and purposes text-based adventure games on the personal computer are dead and buried. There is an entire generation of electronic gamers playing now that has never had the experience of getting a command line response such as: "I am sorry, but I don't understand that." or, "You want to do what with the cheese?" in answer to a simple text request.

Knowing the catch phrase "You are in a cave" is enough to show your age in the fast-changing world of electronic gaming.

However, there is another world of gaming these days: Net gaming. Out in the electronic ether, text-based games have been reborn as multiplayer experiences. We have talked about the value of Internet MUD and MUSH environments in past columns. But a somewhat ignored area of the on-line text-based gaming experience are the games of this type that are provided to pay on-line services, such as CompuServe and GENie.



Why would people play a text-based game? With games available like *Cyberstrike*, *Air Warrior* and *BattleTech*, not to mention the highly under-supported *Neverwinter Nights*, what would possess players to go back to the text environment that adventure gaming only so recently climbed out of?

Well, that really is something of a judgment call. Ask a dozen players of text adventures for their top three answers and you will get a number of varied opinions. However one thing is for sure, all of them will have in one of their top three spots the answer "flexibility."

You can do more with a text game than you can with a visual game. The nature of the interface makes it easy for the programmers to add more features to the environment without worrying about having to integrate video and sound modules. In the average text game there are literally hundreds of verbs that will allow actions on the part of the character. Some of these are simple and do nothing other than set mood, such as giggling or scratching yourself. However, combining some of these apparently simple actions together allows a richness of control

that is not possible in any graphic game yet devised.

For example, in a recent game on GENie, two characters were in a crowded environment. The first character tapped the second on the shoulder, then whispered a message in the second character's ear. This isn't doable in a graphical game. This sort of action might seem simple, but in fact it creates more of a feeling of reality than the best photo-realism backed up by a few basic joystick movements or spells.

Another factor might very well be the "book was better than the movie" syndrome. No graphics engine in the world can compare with the human mind. Given just a few written cues, those gamers with some visual creativity can produce a fully blown environment with every detail in place—all in their own head.

However, even with the good points of these games, conventional wisdom says that the text-only games are rapidly being outstripped by their graphical counterparts in terms of users and interest levels. Well, conventional wisdom should do a little more homework.

Cyberstrike, by Simutronics, was one of

the most hyped on-line games of 1994. Many magazines gave it exceptionally high ratings, and it even scored a best on-line game of the year. But what is the cash cow for Simutronics? **Gemstone III**, a text adventure game, has that honor.

Kesmai games, which has **BattleTech** and **Airwarrior**, also finds that **Island of Kesmai** still remains a strong draw, even though it is a text-based offering.

So when we are told that Time Warner Electronic Publishing and Simutronics have teamed up to create a new text-based game, it doesn't seem quite so strange and old fashioned as it might at first blush. After taking a quick run through the beta test, it starts to appear like this might be a downright good idea.

The vast preponderance of all text-based games, be they the custom engines on the pay services or the MUDs and MUSHes of the Net, are based in fantasy worlds. A small smattering handle science-fiction themes and a tiny number handle gothic role-playing games, such as **Vampire**, by White Wolf.

TW and Simutronics decided, wisely, to avoid this overstocked field for their new offering. Instead they decided to put up something entirely new that would have a huge built-in audience from the onset: a mystery role-playing environment.

In **Modus Operandi**, available on both GEnie and Prodigy by the time this magazine hits print, the players will take on the persona of an amateur sleuth who is on vacation (or fleeing enemies) on the fictional Caribbean island of Morada. Umbrella drinks and linen suits are the order of the day as gamers flee their overcrowded computer desks and are electronically transported to an environment that feels like something borrowed directly from an Agatha Christie novel. (It wasn't. Morada is a wholly original creation.)

With a feeling of a combination of a French and British colonial island, Morada has more than enough atmosphere to satisfy even the most starved electronic mystery fan. There are high-class clubs that seem to step out of British mystery fiction, and at the same time seedy dive bars on the other end of the city that might be a proper setting for Mike Hammer, as long as he was willing to trade in his fedora for a Panama Jack hat.

Plots, murders, thievery and other employment opportunities for detectives-without-portfolio abound on the island. The goal of the player is to interact with the NPCs and solve these mysteries. As mysteries are solved, the player acquires more money and prestige, attracting better and better jobs.

The engine used for this environment will be familiar to MUSH players: It is basically the same interface. However, the underlying structure is radically different, allowing for



more programming flexibility and a stable platform performance even with thousands of players logged on. The technology is called the Interactive Fiction Engine, produced by Simutronics. The IFE is currently being used in **Gemstone III** with good results, so players can be sure that this is a stable piece of code, and that most of the bugs have been worked out of the product.

For those who aren't familiar with MUSH environments, the text-based interface of **Modus** might be a bit daunting. Everything is presented in a text-only format that scrolls down the screen as it is received. So what's the problem with that, you ask? Well, there is a lot of information that can be coming in at one time. The upshot of this problem is text scrolling down the screen much too fast to read.

Fortunately, the people at Simutronics aren't ignorant of this problem. In **Gemstone III** they have devised a text interface reader that vastly simplifies the text flow of the game, splitting the incoming text into manageable chunks and adding some pretty pictures to boot. As of this writing, the interface for **Modus** wasn't finished, but the company promises that the **Modus** interface will incorporate all of the ease-of-use features found in the **Gemstone III** front end.

The IFE and engineering expertise are what Simutronics is bringing to the game, but Time Warner is making no less of a contribution. Time Warner, as any reader who has poked his/her head out of his/her computer room in the last few years will know, is one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. Their strength is content. Content is what they will be bringing to the **Modus Operandi** game, in the form of some of the best-selling mystery writers of our time.

Warner Book's Mysterious Press has been

hosting their authors through the game, seeing which ones might be interested in writing scenarios for **Modus**. Parnell Hall, former detective and screen writer who's protagonist, Stanley Hastings, has been featured in a number of books, including the current **Actor** and the soon to be released **Movie**, was one of the authors on the beta tour.

"This is potentially a new field for us mystery writers. This might have the potential to allow us to play with and create another kind of mystery. A mystery with many possible endings."

However, Hall is concerned about the level of training required to enter this new field.

"It is going to require more training. I need to know how the game operates. This is brand new, so I can't get a copy of a good working script and see what works and what doesn't [dramatically and game mechanics wise]. This is not something like a book where I can just get one and read it in a linear way and learn. I will have to take the time to play it and figure out what can work and what can't," he said.

However, Simutronics is going to be providing staff just to help the authors translate their visions to the game.

"We will be providing support staff to help the authors. We will team an author with one of our game experts to make their vision work," stated Neil Harris of Simutronics.

The jury is still out on whether **Modus Operandi** will make a killing in the growing on-line world. But with best-selling authors, a proven engine and two well-backed companies running the project, all the clues are there.

by John P. Withers

Prodigy Update

Note: In the news this month, Prodigy is breaking so much ground we have decided to dedicate the entire news section to its developments.

P2 Mutates

The promised P2 technology interface, profiled here recently, has been stalled slightly by Prodigy, but not by much.

The problem was that P2 required 8 Megs of memory to operate effectively, and user surveys showed that most Prodigy users weren't on platforms that sported that many RAM chips. Instead of requiring users to update, the service instead took a couple of months to come up with a slightly scaled-down version of the technology that will run fine on the 4-Meg platform.

Called WebSynch, the new interface will have almost all of the features that were present in the P2 alpha version, with the only exception being the database engine.

The WebSynch package will be more than just a front end redesign, but will trigger massive changes in the underlying structure of the Prodigy service, particularly in how it relates to the World Wide Web.

As it stands currently, the WWW browser package provided by Prodigy (the first service to offer full WWW access) is an additional piece of software and separate from the rest of the Prodigy front end. With the WebSynch package, this separation will become a thing of the past.

The center of WebSynch will be a navigator window that will give users access to all of the areas of the Prodigy service, but will also hold URL bookmarks for WWW sites, gophers, FTP sites and other areas of Net content. When using the navigator, no attempt will be made to distinguish between Prodigy and non-Prodigy content. The user will be totally free to explore the areas that interest them, both on and off of the Prodigy service itself.

At the same time, Prodigy content areas will be realigned along "neighborhoods." These neighborhoods will represent areas of maximum user interest.

"For instance all of the people most interested in Genealogy will be in one

neighborhood," says Brian Ek, spokesperson for Prodigy.

While WebSynch is slightly scaled down compared to the full-bore implementation of the P2 interface shown in press meetings at CES in Las Vegas last winter, it is not by very much.

"You will recognize it as the same product. Just most of the database functions are gone," Ek continued.

The functions in question were databases comprising Prodigy content that were stored on the user's computer. Manipulations of this data in the user's system allowed

The next logical step is to allow users to create home pages.

To implement this capability, Prodigy has built their own custom home page creation tool. While it will never get the moniker of most flexible, it does allow users to create usable home pages in a variety of formats in about 15 minutes, without learning the HTML language.

The creator relies on four predesigned forms that will allow the users to present themselves to the Web with their best foot forward.

The categories include Basic, Business

Card, Top Ten List and Out on the Town.

The Basic category will include personal information and thoughts from the builder (at their discretion of course) and can include hotlinks to the user's favorite WWW locations.

Business Card will be a professional listing, including items like fax number and profession. Linking to a corporate URL will be available.

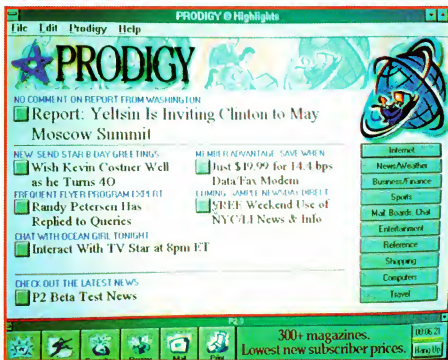
The Top Ten List will be just

what it says. A hotlinked list to the top 10 sites the user has an interest in.

Possibly the most interesting category is Out on the Town. This is a form for users to enter a tour guide of their own town, including sites to see, things to avoid, restaurants, hotels and other notes of interest to the tourist or traveler.

By including the Out on the Town category, Prodigy might very well make this home page option a useful service as opposed to just another repository of boring home pages. Should enough users create this type of page, this might serve as something of an on-line database for those surfers making a trip in the near future who want the advice of natives as opposed to Chamber of Commerce travel guides.

The new home pages will be provided to Prodigy users free of charge.



unparalleled search and correlation functions. This facility was mostly of interest to serious investors and sports fans.

However, for those thirsting for this full power, Prodigy hasn't shelved the technology. The full-bore, 8-Meg version of the P2 technology is still going to come out, but now it is linked to the release of Windows '95. Since Windows '95 will require at least 8-Megs to run (according to current Microsoft press releases), the P2 interface will not be requiring any more memory over the standard configuration.

The WebSynch technology should be available for download by users at the end of June, and the full release of P2 will be in August, the same time as the expected release of Windows '95. Prodigy is also planning a Macintosh version of the interface, but the release date wasn't disclosed.

Home Page Creator

While the other two of the big three services play catch up to Prodigy's scoop on offering WWW service, Prodigy is forging ahead with refining their WWW capability.

More To Come

With the revisions at Prodigy, expect more announcements in the next 30 days, including expanded entertainment areas and more programming focused on kids.

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TEST LAB

Subwoofers with Attitude

Remember when the only noise coming out of a computer was a beep, and if there was any other noise it usually meant bad news? Those days are long gone. With today's multimedia applications churning out theater quality sound, it is time to look at some speakers built to win the rat race. All but one of the speaker systems *Test Lab* selected for this review have powered satellites and separate subwoofers, the combination of which can provide today's PC audiophile with the best quality sound possible—until somebody comes out with seven channel amplified surround sound for the PC. Don't laugh, three years ago who would have dreamed of subwoofers for PCs?

Test Lab attempted to bring together speaker systems that typify the new high-end of the audio spectrum while maintaining a good ratio of performance to price. The suggested retail prices for these speakers range from \$150 to around \$700, covering everything from the needs of the average PC gamer to multimedia presentation.

Tech-Speak

What do all those numbers and symbols you see in speaker ads really mean? Some of even the most technically proficient hardware gurus are ill equipped to properly evaluate sound components for their systems. Often it is the simplest, yet still critical, components that prove the most difficult to properly evaluate: the speakers. Due to this simple lack of knowledge, many machines with excellent video cards, the latest in processors and even cutting-edge sound cards are laid low by inferior speakers.

With just a few minutes of study anyone can learn how to select the proper speakers for their system. Comprehending a few simple terms and knowing what numerical ranges constitute good, medium and bad performance, anyone can confidently select the proper sound output for their system just by a quick glance at the spec sheet.

To gain a proper understanding of sound, a few basics are in order. The first is



knowing that sound is merely vibrations in air, like the ripples produced when a rock is thrown in the middle of a pond. The height of waves, whether in water or in air, is called the amplitude. The distance between each wave determines the frequency.

Amplitude, or the height of the waves, is a very important measurement. The higher a wave, the stronger it is. Back to the pond. Small ripples in a pond don't travel very far and quickly give way to calm waters. Larger waves, however, travel much further. They are simply stronger.

People in technical fields love to use big words in place of smaller ones. Hence, most people know amplitude by another name, volume. As simple as it seems, on a basic level amplitude and volume are the same thing. The unit of measurement is called the decibel, abbreviated dB. For every 10 dB increase, the volume sounds twice as loud.

For comparison's sake, a whisper is around 10 dBs, speech is roughly 50 dBs, and a loud rock band can hit over 100 dBs.

Frequency is even easier than amplitude to understand. Frequency is the number of waves, measured per second. To keep technical people in business, this measurement is called a Hertz, abbreviated Hz, but all it means is the number of waves per second: 1 Hz is one wave per second; 1,000 waves per second is one kilo Hertz and abbreviated kHz (the same as 1000 bytes of computer memory is 1 kB). The human hearing range is roughly 20 Hz to 18 kHz, though some people can hear up to 20 kHz and a tiny handful can hear all the way up to 22 kHz. The higher the frequency, the higher pitched the sound. A very deep voice might be 200 Hz and a very high-pitched shriek 10 kHz.

Bandwidth is a very common and important frequency-related audio measurement. Bandwidth is the range of frequencies something can produce (or pick up), often called frequency response. This measurement is important in picking out a speaker. The largest spread is the best. Good numbers are from 20 Hz to 20 kHz+. This is the total hearing range of 99 percent of the human race. Medium numbers are 150-200 Hz to 18 kHz and anything outside of this range is starting to get a bit funky.

- **Yamaha YST-S81010 Computer Monitor Speaker System, \$349.95 MSRP**
- **Altec-Lansing ACS300.1, \$299 MSRP**
- **Advent Powered Partners AV570, \$349.99 MSRP**
- **Advent AV622, \$299 MSRP**
- **Koss SW/150, \$179.99 MSRP**
- **Bose Acoustimass, Range \$450-700**

When talking about sound, noise naturally comes up. Noise is the random sound that slips in from the equipment to the sound, or signal. Noise is measured in dB and is commonly presented in a number called signal to noise ratio. A very solid signal to noise ratio is 90 dB. This means that the signal is doubled nine times over the noise. Pretty unlikely to botch up the music. A decent S/N ratio would be around 70 dB, and things start getting pretty ugly, at least from a musical point of view, below 60 dBs. For casual use in games, maybe more noise would be tolerable, depending on the person (8-Bit Sound Blasters run roughly a 40 dB S/N ratio) but for those users with more serious sound applications in mind or just discriminating taste, the higher this number the better.

If one is shopping for a subwoofer, there are two important criteria: First, make sure it is a subwoofer and not just a large speaker in a pretty box. What differentiates the two is a device called a "crossover." This little jewel blocks sound above a specified range coming to the speaker, for example all sound over 250 Hz. This prevents the subwoofer from playing high range sounds that would be muffled and distorted.

An ideal frequency response for a subwoofer would be something like 35 Hz to 120 Hz. This produces only the lowest sounds and with good amplification allows the listener to feel, as well as hear, the bass.

The second criteria is amplification. A good PC subwoofer should have an internal amplifier pushing a minimum of 15 watts. Less power will make the bass sound weak and wimpy. The reason one wants more power to the sub than to the satellites is to allow it to deliver bass tones with the same clarity as one gets in the high ranges.

The final important statistic is distortion: the distorting of the frequency of a signal due to reproduction. This is measured in total harmonic distortion, or THD, and is measured as a percentage. An excellent THD is 0.1 percent and 0.6 percent or lower is acceptable. Low is good in THD. Some might tolerate as much as 2 percent, but at that level even the most tin-eared individuals will note a problem.

Now with all that out of the way let's get down to the heart of the matter.

Systems

Yamaha, known around the world for high-quality musical instruments as well as stereo components and speakers, has brought subwoofer sound to its PC Speakers with the **Yamaha YST-SS1010 Computer Monitor Speaker System**. This system consists of a pair of Yamaha YST-M10 powered satellite speakers backed up by a Yamaha YST-MSW10 Powered Subwoofer. The YST-M10s provide 10 watts per channel from 80 Hz to 20 kHz. The YST-MSW10 delivers 25 watts at 35 Hz to 250 Hz. For a home or auto sound system this would be a

bit high but seems to be comparable with the output of many PC subwoofers.

Yamaha has incorporated good looks as well as good performance in the YST-SS1010 system. The system is available in black or computer platinum with cloth covered faces as opposed to metal grills. The satellites have durable plastic cases and are nicely contoured giving them an attractive book-end look sure to complement any desktop. The subwoofer is housed in a wooden case with a molded plastic front giving it a descriptive look that says, "Don't hide me under the desk."

The right speaker has controls for power on/off, volume and presence. The last two are a little too close together, which can cause you to accidentally turn one knob while adjusting the other. The presence control allows frequency boost and cut, of up to +7 dB at 10+kHz, allowing one to emphasize vocals when playing audio CDs

say the least. The clam-like shape allows multiple mounting options as well as the ability to close and tuck them away for easy transportation. Each satellite has three controls. The right speaker has power on/off, volume and a mixer to blend two separate audio sources into a single output. For example, one could use these speakers for the PC and still have a discman hooked up to them. The left speaker houses the controls for balance, hi (treble) and bass volume. There are no switches or knobs on the subwoofer, so one is free to put it wherever one likes. It is shrouded in a heavy plastic case that, though it doesn't scream style, produces excellent low-range sound and is small enough to go under the desk and not cramp leg room.

Both the satellites and the subwoofer are powered by 18 watt amps. The systems frequency response is 35 Hz to 20 kHz 13 dB and the bass crossover is 120 Hz 24 dB



through the PC. The subwoofer has its own controls for power and volume as well as a two position "high cut" (crossover) switch that provides two settings for frequency response, high and low.

Sound quality was very good from the satellite speakers and the sub delivered smooth rich bass. This system won the 1995 Innovations award at the Consumer Electronics Show, which in and of itself is a glowing recommendation. In short, one will find everything one would expect from Yamaha in this speaker system. The suggested retail price is \$349.95, but *Test Lab* was able to find them as low as \$199.99 in stores, making them an exceptional value.

Altec Lansing, makers of the highly acclaimed ACS300 system, have upgraded it in the form of the **ACS300.1**. The satellite speakers for this system are interesting to

octave, giving resonating bass that can be felt as well as heard. The high notes are as clear as the low ones and at full volume Green Day was as undistorted as it was at half volume. It should be noted that, during normal use, *Test Lab* kept these speakers set at about quarter volume and had all the full bodied sound one could want. It is obvious why Altec Lansing has won many awards and is preferred for multimedia presentations. The suggested retail price of \$299 is a good value but some careful hunting can get you a set for around \$200 making them the best bang for the buck among this group.

Advent, a division of International Jensen, Inc., has packed a powerful punch into its wedge-shaped **Powered Partners AV570** speakers. These speakers are a little larger than most PC speakers, 9"x 9"x10.5", and weigh in at almost 10 lbs. each.

The space and weight are necessary as each unit contains a 35-watt amp as well as a 5" long extrusion polypropylene woofer and a 1" fluid-coupled polydome tweeter. The frequency response is from 40 Hz to 25 kHz 13 dB, providing a full range of sound. There is no subwoofer with the AV570 series but don't let that lessen the initial impression, the 5" woofer produces high-quality deep bass, and one need not make space for a bulky third speaker. These are solid all-around speakers fully capable of handling a multitude of audio demands. Owners are also not limited by the need to plug them in. Advent provides an optional battery pack, car cigarette lighter adapter and carry bag to give you great multimedia sound even from a laptop on the go. They were even chosen by Sigma Designs, a company who takes multimedia sound very seriously, to be included in its RealMagic Special Edition Multimedia upgrade kit.

Advent has equipped the AV570s with a mounting system that allows them to be bolted practically anywhere and then aimed in any direction. To keep them portable, one can simply set them down on the desk, where they will look right at home. Each unit has an independent power supply and on/off switch located on the back, and an automatic on/off circuit that will turn the speakers off one minute after the signal stops. There are also controls on each speaker for volume, treble and bass to allow compensation for ambient noise if they are placed far apart, inside or out. Advent has placed a suggested retail price of \$349.99 on the AV570s but some diligent shopping turned them up for as little as \$250.

Another offering from the good people at Advent is the AV622 speaker system. This system consists of two small satellite speakers with 2.5" drivers backed up by a subwoofer with a 6" dual voice coil woofer. Frequency response for each unit was unavailable. However, the entire system is rated at 50 Hz to 20 kHz, which is a little high considering the subwoofer. The sub is powered by a 30 watt amp, and the satellites are powered at 8 watts each. The controls for the system are all on the subwoofer and consist of power on/off, volume, bass and treble. This arrangement makes fine-tuning difficult unless you are willing to devote a large portion of desktop to the subwoofer.

The satellites are small enough to fit easily onto even the most crowded desk or can be wall mounted. The subwoofer, on the other hand, measured a whopping 16" x 12.75" x 6", making placement a problem. The sound quality was good until volume levels approached full, at which a low but noticeable hum developed. Something else that bears mentioning is the fact that the subwoofer sounded more like a good bass speaker than an actual sub, which should allow you to "feel" the music. Even with Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" going at full volume, the subwoofer could only be

considered good bass accompaniment. With a suggested list price of \$299 (assume a flat \$200 on the street) these would be pricey at best, and something one might wish to steer clear of considering the other selections available in this price range.

Koss has entered the high-end PC audio field with their SW/150 speaker system. This system consists of Koss' HD/50 satellite speakers and their SW/1 subwoofer. Each of the satellites runs a 3.5" driver at 4.5 watts from 150 Hz to 20 kHz. The subwoofer contains two 4" woofers and a 20-watt amp operating at 40 Hz to 120 Hz. The subwoofer has controls for power on/off and volume. The satellite controls are located on the right speaker and consist of volume



control and two position switches for treble boost, bass boost and the input selector. Also, on the front of the right speaker, Koss has provided jacks for headphone and microphone. The microphone jack has to be connected to a sound card via a microphone in socket on the back of the speaker, but it does make connection easier if one doesn't leave the microphone connected all the time. The power on/off switch seems to have been replaced by an amp on/off switch, inconveniently located on the lower back side of the same speaker, in the middle of all the plugs.

This system delivers good quality sound, however, the subwoofer appeared to play the entire range of music and not just the 40 Hz to 120 Hz listed. With a little fine-tuning, this system was pouring out smooth sounds. The satellites produced good bass and treble response as well as high volume, considering the relatively low 4.5 watts per channel. One nice feature provided by this system is the ability to operate the satellites on three C-cell batteries each. This provides the true portability desired by many users. Of course, it comes at the cost of being able to use the sub, but the satellites do a fine solo job. The SW/150 carries one of the best price tags of all the systems reviewed at a suggested retail price of \$179.99. The street price is around \$140, comparable to some two-speaker systems. All in all, a low cost sound solution.

Bose, one of the top names in speaker manufacture worldwide, brings its Acoustimass speaker system to the PC. The satellite speakers are tiny, measuring

3" x 3" x 4.75", allowing them to be placed just about anywhere and the 7.5" x 18.5" x 8.5" subwoofer can be stowed under the desk. The bass module contains a 5.25" woofer, and each of the satellites house a 2.5" wide range driver. The base module has a built-in bi-amplification system delivering 50 watts to the bass driver and 20 watts to each of the satellites. The system controls are all located on the subwoofer and include volume, treble and bass. The power on/off switch is on the back of the sub making it a little difficult to access, especially if it is under the desk.

This system provides the beautiful, crisp, clean sound Bose has become famous for. Despite the diminutive size of the satellites, they produce dynamic sound across their entire range. The subwoofer delivers thundering bass and the crossover filters out all but the lowest signals preventing distortion on the high end. Everything from .avi files to 10,000 Maniacs sounded excellent through the Acoustimass. Response specifications for this system were unavailable but an educated guess would place them at about 35 Hz to 120 Hz for the sub and roughly 150 Hz to 20 kHz for the satellites. These speakers provide all the quality and volume you could ask for, but it comes at a price. That price range is \$450-700 depending on where you buy them. This is not unreasonable for business applications. For the average PC user, however, it is asking a bit much considering a gig drive can be had cheaper. If one's budget can handle it, the Acoustimass provides some of the best PC sound available.

Last Word

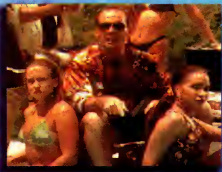
There are a few things to remember when shopping for a new speaker system: First, listen to each unit you are interested in for as long as it takes to make up your mind. The salesperson may seem impatient but they don't have to live with your choice. Another important tip is to take your own CD with you. That way you know what the music is supposed to sound like and you also know it was not a special enhanced version used just to sell you speakers. If you have friends with good speakers spend some time checking them out. Do not just take *Test Lab's* or anyone else's word that "these are the ones to buy." Everyone has different taste and hears things slightly differently. Spend a few days and listen to as many systems as possible. You should also consider how much you want to spend and balance that against how often and in what ways you will use the system. For instance, portability is a very nice feature, but if you will never take them off your desk why pay more for that feature? The main point is that you are happy with your choice. The best tech specs in the world amount to nothing if you don't like the sound.

by Ed Dille

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FLIGHT LEADER

What to Expect from the Virtual Experience

Interactive games are getting a lot of visibility these days. Some cable companies are even providing "interactive" channels designed for use with various console platforms.

Flight simulation fans, especially the "hard-core" gang, have displayed a profound fondness for competing against other human beings instead of battling endless waves of artificially intelligent drones. Those dedicated to the hobby generally learn to beat computer-controlled bandits in short order and subsequently require greater challenges.

Have Modem, Will Battle

Unfortunately, there are relatively few outlets for the simulation fanatic to pursue. The most accessible avenue is still the straightforward modem-to-modem connection. Although it's supported by relatively few flight simulators, those that do support head-to-head play develop strong followings. **Air Warrior**, **Falcon 3.0**, and **1942: Pacific Air War** have generated sizable groups dedicated to combat over modems. "Ladder" competitions have sprung up on nearly every on-line network for each of these simulations, and recently an effort began to create cross-service competitions where, say, America Online pilots would dogfight CompuServe sim jocks.

Players looking for modem action have fairly limited choices, especially considering the number of flight-related games on the market. Of all the combat flight simulations supporting head-to-head action, only **1942: Pacific Air War** is less than 2 years old. Each year sees a series of new flight games, but an extremely small percentage support modem play. The on-line networks, arguably the best place to find modem-concerned users, have bristled with requests, demands and pleas for expanded modem support with less than spectacular compliance by the game publishers.

Why? Well, there seems to be two reasons. The first reason traces its roots to the



arcane art of "marketing." What happens to all those "survey" cards tucked inside game boxes questioning what types of computer hardware gamers have? I admit, I generally throw most of them away. I'm not thrilled with filling out an inventory of my computer room on an unsealed postcard and dropping it in a mailbox.

The cards that do get returned are scrutinized by voodoo witchdoctors (disguised as marketing experts) casting chicken bones and bat wings on their office floor. These people somehow collate letters, faxes, phone calls, e-mail and survey cards and determine "what the market wants." The end result often is, "we haven't gotten enough requests for that particular feature."

This, of course, is a chicken-and-egg argument. There are relatively few modem gamers out there because there are relatively few modem-capable games because there are relatively few modem gamers out there.

There's a largely untapped market out there for modem gaming, but many game companies are unwilling to risk opening up that market. I won't dispute the conclusions the marketeers come to based on the data they review, but I would argue that these marketeers are letting opportunity slip by. Other areas of entertainment are rushing

headlong toward interactive systems while most flight simulation producers seem content to sit on the sidelines. When the big explosion in interactive entertainment occurs, these companies will find themselves playing catch-up.

There's a second, less ominous reason some companies overlook modem play. It appears that designing a stable, reliable modem-to-modem connection with a normal telecommunications program is fairly straightforward, but doing so with a game is a herculean chore at best. Nearly every modem-capable game I've played (flight simulation or otherwise) seems considerably more likely to crash during a modem session than during stand-alone play. With the ever-increasing effort to reduce design intervals and development costs, some game companies simply choose to avoid such a problematic area.

Have Network, Don't Need to Travel

More exciting than mere head-to-head play, but currently even more restricted, is on-line gaming. I've been a longtime fan of the idea of on-line gaming. Flying an arena filled with human opponents provides a thrill

not available in stand-alone flight simulators. There are very few things comparable to leading 20 or 30 simulation jocks into virtual battle against potentially 100 human opponents intent on stopping us.

Obviously I'm referring to the primary source of on-line flight action currently available: Kesmai's **SVGA Air Warrior**. While at the time of this writing there are two on-line flight simulations available, **Air Warrior** and **Multiplayer Red Baron** (MPRB) on the Imagination Network (INN), MPRB pales in comparison to **Air Warrior**. MPRB originally suffered from serious network delays that caused one to see the opponent where he was seven seconds ago, not where he is now. Subsequently, one would find oneself safely behind the enemy only to receive a lethal blow from the opponent's guns. Despite the usually friendly nature of INN members, this network's problems, the waiting lines and the limited scope of combat seriously reduced MPRB's appeal to hard-core simulation fans. INN has reportedly fixed most of the network problems with the introduction of high-speed modems, but the scope of combat is still restricted to (at most) two vs. two dogfights.

Air Warrior, on the other hand, offers an entire world complete with factories, runways and national borders. Although **Air Warrior** does suffer a few problems of its own, it provides a virtual arena with an order of magnitude more intricate than MPRB. Some **Air Warrior** squadrons have been known to spend several days creating intricate, coordi-



nuances, **Air Warrior** introduces a "hit bubble" around each aircraft. Bullets entering anywhere in the hit bubble (which can often be several times the size of the aircraft itself) are counted the same as a direct hit on the enemy.

There are two things every **Air Warrior** fanatic shares: 1) They viciously and endlessly defend **Air Warrior** when challenged by

other flight simulations, and 2) they viciously and endlessly attack **Air Warrior**'s own flaws. A chip or flaw in a cubic zirconium copy. Likewise, **Air Warrior** players tend to see **Air Warrior** as a rare, but flawed diamond. Consequently, they defend its

Confirmed Kill. **Confirmed Kill** is undeniably a direct competitor for **Air Warrior**. **Confirmed Kill** has the distinct advantage of coming "second" in the market. Kesmai may have created the market, but they have been slow to advance **Air**

Warrior. **Confirmed Kill** is coming to the market with a newer generation of technology and threatens to unseat **Air Warrior** as king of the on-line hill. **Confirmed Kill** will include a new generation of flight modeling, network performance and graphics, as well as address many users' complaints concerning **Air Warrior**.

Of course, Kesmai has a follow-up product in the works. The lines are being drawn for what looks to be a bitter battle including a technology race and a price war. Consumers should end up being the big winners, though, as both Domark and Kesmai race to provide the "best" service at the "lowest" cost.

What's the bottom line? Interactive entertainment is coming. Too many companies across the entertainment industry are investing too heavily in entertainment. Nearly all the game players I've spoken with prefer playing their favorite computer games against human opponents and/or with human allies over playing against the computer. As more players get a taste of the virtual worlds, the demand for said virtual worlds will increase. I fully expect the demand to increase along an exponential curve; that is, one of these days a lot of people will decide "interactive entertainment" is in vogue. Until then, the rest of us have to make our voices heard by sending feedback (and those survey cards) to the marketing witchdoctors until we can convince them of the viability of the industry.



nated strike plans designed to devastate enemy operations. As with real war, no battle plan survives contact with the enemy, but that too increases **Air Warrior**'s appeal. Kesmai deserves credit for providing the first fully functional on-line flight sim.

Air Warrior also suffers from transmission delays through the various on-line networks, but not nearly as bad as MPRB once did. These communication problems, while quite annoying, rarely make **Air Warrior** unplayable. In an attempt to offset network

value over (what they see as) cheap copies while simultaneously bemoaning its flaws. It's rare for a game to develop such a devoted following. Such dedication is clearly a tribute to Kesmai.

Diamond Today, Coal Tomorrow?

What does the future hold for on-line flight simulations? Competition. Domark and ICI are entering the on-line ring with

by Tom "KC" Basham

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HAPPY RETURNS

Return Fire simulates war for mainstream gamers

Those traditional enemies, Brown and Green, are at it again in this real-time military strategy game. As supreme commander, the player artfully mixes the capabilities of a combined arms force (tanks, helicopters, armored support vehicles and jeeps) to locate the other side's flag. When a commander captures the opposition's flag, it must be retrieved by a jeep and brought to headquarters to claim the victory.

Perhaps in mockery of exaggerated reward screens, **Return Fire** salutes a successful mission with a black-and-white newsreel of a mammoth victory parade, accompanied by thunderous martial music.

Return Fire offers the solitaire player full-screen animated graphics. In



TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Prolific Software
SYSTEM: 3D0
THEME: Military
MEGABITS: n/a
PLAYERS: 1 or 2
LEVELS: 8

head-to-head competition, a split screen shows each leader the closest enemy.

The artificial intelligence for the machine-directed side in one-player contests is no pushover. The robot-led forces fight tenaciously and can orchestrate some lethal ambushes and surprise attacks. Enemy submarines, for instance, can puncture the serenity of a copter skimming over otherwise uninhabited waters.

The smaller display cuts enjoyment of the Two-player Mode, but the heightened competition more than balances any weakening of the visuals. **Return Fire** will gain tremendously in popularity when a network version makes it possible for each commander to have a full-size battlefield.

Developer Silent Software put the

accent on playability in **Return Fire**. The fast pace and responsive movement system are a far cry from the exacting detail and convoluted play-mechanics of hex-grid wargames. **Return Fire** won't be a great favorite with hard corps arm-chair soldiers. It's not realistic enough to thrill Gary Grigsby's legion of fans.

Return Fire is really for the rest of us, who want some mind-stretching fun without the necessity of eating field rations and bivouacking in the backyard.



It's fast and fun strategizing with enough explosions and other frills to make it visually entertaining.

How easy is it to play? The disc comes without a rules folder. All that's provided in hard copy is an order form

for **Return Fire**-related merchandise. This absence of massive documentation immediately distinguishes it from conventional military sims with their telephone book-size manuals.

Replacing written documentation is an on-screen tutorial guide. With text and illustrations, it skillfully communicates the games essentials. Most game enthusiasts will be playing adequately by the time they finish the first mission. **Return Fire** could *still* have benefited from a set of written instructions, but few experienced electronic gamers will suffer badly.

The control systems for the four vehicles are effective and simple. In fact, the game gives a choice of vehicle-centered or screen-oriented movement control. The choice is made on a case-by-case basis, so the jeep can use one system and the chopper another.



The basic perspective is top-down, though the focus narrows and widens to suit the on-screen events. A strategic map pinpoints objectives, though the helicopters are also useful for in-the-field reconnaissance for those whose map-reading skills need some polish.

The key to the game is limited resources. When pulling a new vehicle



from the bunker, it is possible to check how many of each type remain in storage—and how much ammo of the appropriate type is available.

It boils down to the price of victory. Even the toughest scenarios are winnable by a persistent, if inept, general. Anyone can slug through the missions, especially the first couple. However, overall success in **Return Fire** depends on winning battles economically rather than by sheer attrition. The term "Pyrrhic Victory" is particularly germane to this game. The army that

in any mission. As the player rolls through, or flies above, hostile streets, the goal is to find and obliterate flag towers until a flag is discovered in the smoking ruins of one of them. Triumph is not as quickly earned as just blowing up the right flag tower. The player then guides the active vehicle back to headquarters and sends out a jeep to get the flag and bring it home. Since the jeeps are lightly armed, it's usually a good idea to blow away all or most of the opposing forces before sending the vulnerable vehicle after the banner.



loses all its helicopters in one of the program's 100 island groups is assured of ultimate defeat. Depots that dispense fuel and ammo are prime targets for any wise commander.

Return Fire, as previously mentioned, is a lethal variant of Capture the Flag. The foe's battle standard is conveniently stored in a flag tower. Somewhat frustratingly, the enemy has erected quite a few of these towers, but the flag is only to be found in one such building

Return Fire is not so much a war game as a strategy contest in which war provides the context for the mind-stretching fun. No knowledge of military history or even orthodox tactics is likely to prove of much aid.

Some magazines, the ones that cater to really gung-ho military simulationists, may dislike **Return Fire**, because it's not truly authentic. Gamers with wider-ranging interests will love it. **B+** (Arnie Katz)

BEHIND THE SCREENS

Return Fire resembles no game more than a mid-1980s computer title, **Raid on Bungling Bay** (Broderbund). The differences between the two shows how far electronic gaming has progressed in the last decade.

This action-strategy entry borrows Broderbund's generic enemies, well-known from **Lode Runner**, and makes them a terrorist group that must be successfully rooted out of its stronghold by valiant helicopter raids.

Although the choppers were very well rendered, the hardware's limitations showed in the sparse background graphics and limited play. The Bunglings wouldn't have stood a chance against **Return Fire**'s varied arsenal of death.

SPIDEY AND HIS ROWDY FRIENDS

Meet the merry Marvel moshing society!

If Acclaim has proven itself to be anything in recent years, it is adaptable. When the breakup with Midway went down, many industry insiders doubted that Acclaim could continue, especially given its huge overhead.

But, fortunately, several years ago the company transformed

itself from a T*HQ-style publisher with great licenses and mediocre product into the numero uno software producer in all the world.

Thus far, Acclaim has relied almost entirely on independent development houses to generate its product, from Sculptured Software and Iguanason to Software Creations. The latter produced one of the best comic-book video games ever with **Maximum Carnage** for Acclaim last year, then tossed their rep in the dumpster with the dreadfully disappointing (and heavily derivative) follow-up, **The Tick**, for FOX.

Max Carnage, however, was probably the finest superhero army vs. supervillain army scenario ever presented in electronic format. There was a strong plot line, but the exposition was handled through cut scenes, while the game action was reserved exclusively for excellent, **Streets of Rage**-type combat.

The latest piece of Marvel Software in the Acclaim arsenal is **Spider-Man Animated Series**, and the developers here are Western Technologies, Inc. While Western shows considerable promise, they have clearly not fine-tuned the development process yet.

Spider-Man is an entertaining enough game. You can crawl on walls and use that Peter Parker web fluid. (Though it frankly does *not* work well when trying to websling; the technique is more efficiently employed getting Spidey up on the ceiling, where he can scramble about, unseen by the evil minions who constantly walk guard duty beneath him.) Spider-Man can also



jump, though not nearly as high as he should.

The primal difficulty, however, is the presence of a single punch command. There are no allusions to "secret" moves, combos or any of the elements that give superhero games their appeal. Nothing gets old in a platform game faster than limited combat options. Sure, Spidey can throw the bonus weapons (Web Bolt, Stun Grenade and Gas Grenade), but to be limited to a single punch drains the will to continue from most action-oriented gamers.

MARVELOUS GAMES

It took quite a while for Marvel to successfully break through into the electronic gaming world. Just as it was in TV and the movies, Marvel and Stan Lee's intense desire to reach multimedia platforms often overwhelmed their good sense.

While DC has always protected its characters (even the TV version of Batman, silly as it was, was not much worse than the contemporary, pre-Dark Knight comics), Marvel was selling computer rights to third-rate publishers like Adventure International for low-quality illustrated text adventures.

These days, however, with bean-counters and character-protective personnel on hand to make the deals, Marvel is finally number one in the video game comicsverse.

Moreover, most of the locations (all five of them!) are physically inhibiting almost to the point of being claustrophobic (ESU's Lab, Coney Island's crumbling Boardwalk, Downtown New York, a Construction Zone and of course, Ravenscroft, the Cooperstown of insane asylums). These tight quarters will tend to frustrate players who want to really cut loose and do some classic spider-style cruising.

There are also an abundance of foreground objects that obscure Spider-Man's movements from the player's view. Then there are the tons of background objects—everything from video monitors to computers—none of which Spidey seems able to interact with.

On the plus side, the graphics are quite good, and there's no shortage of guest stars, from the Fantastic Four (who can be evoked through a menu on certain levels, along with several bonus weapons) to a squadron of roaming bad guys, including the Beetle, Doctor Octopus, Green Goblin, Jack O' Lantern, the Lizard, the Rhino, the Wrecker, the Tinkerer, Scorpion, Mysterio, the Owl, the Alien Spider Slayer, Venom and Alistair Smythe, the son of the guy who invented the original Spider Slayer.



Along the way, the amazing Spidey can acquire several types of power-ups, including an Armor Pick-Up, which provides temporary invincibility; a Health icon, which partially regenerates his power; and an Extra Life power-up, in addition to the heroic partners mentioned above.

The ultimate cut on this electronic game is that it shows a lot of promise, but unfortunately the developers took a few too many wrong turns and wound up with a game that tries to deliver too much when it can barely offer players a generic quality experience. **B-** (Bill Kunkel)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Acclaim
SYSTEM: Genesis
THEME: Action
MEGABITS: N/A
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 5

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SATURDAY NIGHT SHAM MASTERS

Capcom recycles SF2 as a wrestling game

In most cases, when video game publishers set out to produce a wrestling simulation, they make lots of mistakes. First, they have so little respect for wrestling fans that they don't feel the need to immerse the developers in the grappling environment.

Second, they still base everything around kicks and/or punches. While pro wrestling "rules" permit a blow delivered with the forearm or the flat of the foot, punches are illegal. Wrestling is, instead, based on a series of physically interactive maneuvers, most of which could not be executed without the assistance of the guy taking the fall.



Finally, they almost invariably get carried away with the "special" moves. Now, pro wrestling has no shortage of legitimately snazzy maneuvers. I've seen men vertically suplexed backward off the turnbuckle onto the arena floor. I've watched in astonishment, at the so-called "Frankensteiner" in which two wrestlers rush at one another, one goes airborne, and lands, in a sitting position on his opponent's shoulder, facing him. The top guy then flips backward, driving his "victim's" head into the mat.

Yet time and again, we see wrestling games where grapplers perform feats so brazenly absurd that they would insult the intelligence of the densest mark.

The long-delayed Genesis edition of *Saturday Night Slam Masters*



manages to not only hit every one of these blunders, but creates a few new ones of its own. For example, the audiovisual light show that accompany the first wrestler to the ring is pretty darned impressive. It is somewhat less impressive when the second man in receives the exact same wah-wah as he strides down the aisle. Pretty soon, it becomes apparent that *every wrestler in the game* gets the same intro! In wrestling etiquette, this is like every woman at a dinner party showing up in the same outfit. The whole point of ring introductions is

to distinguish the wrestler, individualize them through the use of theme music that is keyed to his personality. It is astonishing that Capcom, a company that has gotten so much mileage out of building unique characters to fight one another could miss this point in the very art form that birthed it!

Bottom line, of course, is that the Capcom developers approached this project as if it were simply another SF2 sausage link, with the only difference being the existence of ring ropes, pinning and the fighters' ability to move other than forward or backward.

Then, of course, there's the name: *Saturday Night Slam Masters*. While there may be regional locations in the United States where they still run matches on Saturday night, there hasn't been a major promotion running on Saturday night TV since NBC dropped the WWF about five years ago. Even live wrestling is generally set for Fridays, rather than Saturday when halls cost more to rent and there's more competition.

Of course, this is just a quibble when compared to everything else that's wrong with this program. It simply continues to return to the same point: With the exception of *Acclaim*, no one in the current electronic gaming marketplace has a clue about how to simulate a worked, i.e., predetermined, sport. So they must begin by making a leap of faith. (After all, spaceships aren't real, either, but that doesn't stop people from enjoying a good sci-fi flick.) Pro grappling, over the years, has evolved a veritable bible of tricks and techniques to get the audience to willingly suspend its disbelief. It's about time the folks who are attempting to simulate that in-the-ring reality started watching to see how it's really done.

Unfortunately, most developers of these products seem to have such contempt for the pseudo-sport, that they assume a one-size-fits-all light show, a guy in a mohawk and a couple of men in masks will swell the hearts of any wrestling maven. It's time for these people either to assign developers who understand how grappling works or to simply try another genre.

Or else some enraged reviewer may have to DDT someone. *(Bill Kunkel)*

COMING TO GRIPS

The history of electronic pro wrestling simulations is a mixed bag at best. In the early days of the NES, Nintendo graced us with *Professional Wrestling*, which remained the finest product of its type for years. Here was a game that, despite the limitations of the then-new NES, gave the player a sense of being involved in an actual wrestling game.

Then came American Technos' WWF coin-op series, which offered realistic looking moves and wrestlers for the first time, and may have served as an inspiration to *Acclaim*, which quickly locked up the WWF home rights. Despite a rocky start (the first game featured floating power-ups!), the series remains the undisputed ring champ.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Capcom
SYSTEM: Genesis
THEME: Pro Wrestling
MEGABITS: 32MB
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: N/A

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FIGHTING NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD

Virtua Fighter knocks you out with total realism



The idea of creating incredibly realistic video games has been a hard-fought goal of mega-companies Nintendo, Sega and newcomer, Sony. All three companies are making giant strides to immerse players in a video game environment to completely fool the senses.



Of the three giants, Sega has managed to jump to the head of the pack with their latest video game release, **Virtua Fighter** (VF).

Originally designed for the arcade in 1993, **Virtua Fighter** has been successfully translated for the Sega Saturn system. Only with the advanced technology present in this platform is Sega able to port over their arcade quarter muncher to a home system.

The premise in **Virtua Fighter** is simple. A player chooses a fighter from a field of eight. Each fighter possesses skills of varying degree including

martial arts styles. The styles range from wrestling to jeet-kun-do to ninjitsu, so most players will be able to select a fighter that suits their style of play. For more on fighting styles used, see the "Actual Motion" box below.

Once a fighter has been chosen, the player must enter the fray of fights. Your opponents are the remaining

ACTUAL MOTION

What few video game players know about **Virtua Fighter** is that Amusement Machine Research and Development (Sega's premier arcade system development group) visited various martial arts schools to study the actual motion for each particular style.

The AM2 team then took what they learned and implanted the moves into the characters they have created in **Virtua Fighter**.

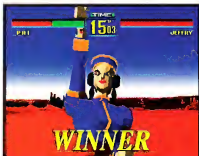
Wireframes of the characters' bodies were constructed. Then the polygons were filled to give the fighters a solid three-dimensional look. The result is the most realistic fighting game ever conceived, with animation that mimicked actual martial arts attacks, defenses, blows and stances.

fighters, selected by the computer.

Of course, the first battle is nothing more than a simple warm-up (even in the most difficult setting). But with each victory, the fights become increasingly difficult, sometimes to the point of frustration. Many of the battles require players to be patient and size up the opponent carefully. Still some levels, like the early ones, can be blown through very easily.

After tirelessly wrecking through the initial field of competition, you will find yourself pitted against a fierce new opponent who goes by the name Dural. Her appearance is similar to the T1000 in *T2*. Along with her unusual combination of speed and power, Dural also bears the knowledge and skill of the other fighters. You could say she is the ultimate fighter. She is tough, but also vulnerable once you learn the nuances of her fighting style.

Of course, the best feature in this game (or any fighting game) is the Versus Mode. In this mode, two players can select any of the fighters and duke it out in bloody head-to-head competition. You can even select the same players to determine who is the most skilled using a particular character.



Considering the system, Sega and AM2 have done a spectacular job in translating this hot arcade fighter to a home system. Arcade purists will be happy to know that the game is nearly identical to the arcade original, retaining all the animation, fighting techniques and combinations that made this game a hit for more than a year.

After enjoying the thrills and action of **Virtua Fighter** at home, game enthusiasts may forgo going back to the arcade as long as translations as nearly perfect as this continue to be produced for home systems. **A** (Al Manuel)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Sega
SYSTEM: Saturn
THEME: Fighting
MEGABITS: CD-ROM
PLAYERS: 1 or 2
LEVELS: N/A

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HEGGS



21ST CENTURY PINBALL TILTS!

Pinball Fantasies rolls over and dies

Pity the long-suffering SNES-owning pinball fans who have waited, year after year, for a decent pinball game. Like innocent ball bearings in a game of cosmic pinball, they have been consistently flogged by metaphorical flippers and buffeted by the bumpers of a cruel, seemingly indifferent fate. These poor devils must feel as if they live under the electronic gaming version of a biblical curse. While their Genesis-owning peers can carry on endlessly about the fantastic plugged-in pin sims they have access to—**Virtual Pinball** (Electronic Arts) and **Crüe Ball** (EA)



Pinball Fantasies, both published by Frontline Designs. So expectations for the initial video game outing ran high.

Alas, the console version of **Pinball Fantasies** is not exactly the answer to a dream. More likely, the emotions of players will range from dismay to betrayal.

Pinball Fantasies is, in fact, a direct port to the SNES from the old 286/16 PC version. This decision, whether prompted by laziness or economic necessity, proved disastrous. The four available tables ("Party Land," "Stones



(complete with music by the Motleys themselves!). Heck, even lowly TG-16 users were legitimately able to die their SNES cousins with boasts on **Alien Crush** and **Devil's Crush**, a pair of legit classics. No, the best the pitiful SNESer can do is toss out titles like **Action52** and **Super Pinball**, praying all the while that their friends have never actually *seen* these atrocities.

Given this backstory, SNES pinball simulation aficionados must have begun salivating the instant they learned that 21st Century—legendary producers of some of the finest pin sims in the PC universe—had been handed the contract to develop Gametek's latest pinball video game. 21st Century's resume includes the extremely well-received computer games **Pinball Dreams** and

and **Bones**, "Billion Dollar Game Show" and "Speed Devils" each have their own strengths and, especially, their unique and obvious weaknesses.

"Party Land," for example, employs a multitramped, three-flipper setup with a carnival theme. "Stones and Bones" uses a spooky scenario full of ghosts, ghouls and a graveyard full of bonus letters. The "Billion Dollar Game Show" utilizes ramps and prize wheels and "Speed Devils" immerses the player in race-track action, complete with revving engines and smoking rubber.

The table layout is a vertical scrolling playfield. The graphics range from the bright and gaudy "Party Land" to the slightly darker "Stones and Bones." None of the boards, however, really embrace their themes. For example, "Stones and Bones" could have benefited from a more atmospheric and horrific movie-style treatment, rather than the overdone spoof-approach that we've already seen far too much of.

The music is generally weak. The circus theme of "Party Land" quickly becomes as annoying as a relentless mosquito in a dark room, if not nearly as diverting. While the bass tempo on "Stones and Bones" is interesting, surely 21st Century could have produced a wider range of aural satisfaction on a game machine as versatile as the SNES.

Where 21st Century really let down its audience, however, is in the game play. Of first and foremost importance for table jockeys is the realism of the ball movement. Unfortunately, **Pinball Fantasies** does not begin to simulate the effects of physics on a real pinball as it rebounds off bumpers and rolls down the board. There is simply no fooling gamers on something like this; anyone who has played pinball knows how the ball rolls and rebounds; they intuitively understand the weight of the ball. When the calculations are this far off, even novices can spot it. Then, of course, we have additional drawbacks, including an absurd scarcity of bumpers and drop targets, while "Stones & Bones" contains only one set of flippers! The rest have a majestic three.

As disappointing as pinball mavens may find **Pinball Fantasies**, it is still, shockingly, the best pinball simulation available for the SNES. **C-** (Laurie Yates)

PINBALL DEEFPREEZE

Pinball pickins are slim indeed on the SNES. **Super Pinball: Behind the Mask**, shipped almost a year after it was reviewed (*EG* 3/94), when Nintendo took over from American Technos.

Super Pinball suffered from an overall lack of ambition. The digitized table reproductions were crammed into a single screen, and the music was more appropriate for pool than pinball. Its lack of special features—multilevels, additional flipper sets, etc.—was the last straw.

Obviously EA and Time Warner (through their Tengen acquisition) have top Genesis sims. What will it take to get them on the SNES and finally halt the pinball deepfreeze? Let's petition Sen. Lieberman!

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Gametek
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Pinball
MEGABITS: 4
PLAYERS: 1-4
LEVELS: N/A

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BRASS KNUCKLES

Knuckles and Company take a tethered trip on the 32X

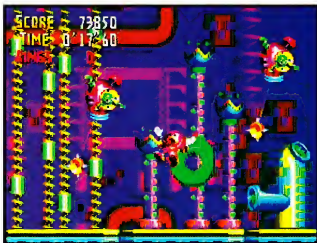
Remember that breakthrough '50s film, *The Defiant Ones*, starring Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis as a pair of racially charged prisoners who liberate themselves from a chain gang but are unable to break the manacles that keep them bound together? The

ambivalent pair go through almost the entire picture linked together in this manner as they run from bloodhounds, wade through rivers and generally evade the prison guards bent on recapturing them.



Great movie, full of dramatic metaphor and gripping suspense. But what could it possibly have to do with **Knuckles Chaotix**, Sega's latest *Sonic* spin-off, and the first appearance of the hot-tempered red echidna on the 32X platform? Work with me.

Like the classic film, the primary dynamic of **Knuckles Chaotix** deals with two characters physically connected to one another, though the link-up comprises nothing so primitive as metal chains. Instead, these state-of-the-art video critters are tethered together by a long stretch of elastic bungee cord with a golden ring on either end. There is a variety of potential tethered teams, with Knuckles able to move in tandem with Vector the Crocodile, Mighty the Armadillo, Charmy Bee (no, we are not making this up) and Espio the Chameleon. The various characters



possess different abilities—Charmy flies and hovers, Espio runs up walls and on ceilings, while Knuckles, of course, can scale walls and glide like a ... bobcat?

Anyway, the plot involves the planned opening of Carnival Island, a massive theme park resort that has hired Knuckles to make sure the premiere goes smoothly. The island, however, runs off the juice generated by the Power Emerald, a device that would work perfectly with the latest batch of Dr. Robotnik's evil inventions, one of which is the Combi Confiner, a miniature cage in which Robotnik imprisons

Espio, Mighty, Vector and Charmy. Upon sussing out the Doc's plan, Knuckles learns that he can liberate his friends one at a time by using two golden rings and a tether, then set off to liberate the island from Robotnik's clammy clutches.

There is also a pair of characters dubbed Heavy the Robot and Bomb, who start out as Robotnik's flunkies but escape to become potential allies. The real problem is that it hardly matters which characters are selected. Once the initially cumbersome tethered movements are mastered, the game is a virtual milk run. The levels are fairly long, but very little happens on them. The scenery is absolutely beautiful, probably the best-looking game on the 32X, but when there are no enemies to rumble with, the beauty of the landscape gets old quickly. The game is also almost totally lacking in the loops and downhill runs that are such a trademark of the earlier *Sonic* games.

If the player is toting 50 or more rings at the end of a level, a giant ring appears which the player leaps into in order to initiate a special stage in which the player-character runs through a crudely rendered six-sided tube, attempting to collect the blue bonus spheres that are required to get the Chaos Ring, which advances the player to the next level.

The bosses, as usual, are pretty impressive—especially the gigantic, red, Sonic-like robot boss. While this is as visually strong as anything on the 32X, it is still a good distance from being able to blow gamers away. It's certainly the prettiest game on the 32X, with lush foliage and moss-covered rocks in the Botanical Base location.

But the problem here is, once again, the game's incredible simplicity. It seems to have been aimed at very young gamers, who are likely to find the tether movement too tough for them to handle. Frustration will also be produced by the fact that the game has so many obstacles, it never gets up to superionic—or even plain old Sonic—speed. Older players who take the time to master the tether, however, will definitely find entertainment value here.

It's pretty, but as a 32X release, it just doesn't seem like a significant advance over a Genesis game. **B-** (Bill Kunkel)

KNUCKLE TRICKS

Some special features players should enjoy on **Knuckles Chaotix** include:

- 1) Capture *all* the Golden Rings, and you'll get a special ending.
- 2) There's a Practice Stage that helps a lot in learning how and whether to tether.
- 3) Once Level 25 is complete, you get to face Mecha Sonic, who has a series of puzzle-like traps that must be eluded.
- 4) When Mecha Sonic goes down, the Big Red Sonic Robot must be bashed. Attack him from the left and right sides, then wait for him to back up and ... wham!

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Sega
SYSTEM: 32X
THEME: Arcade
MEGABITS: 24 MB
PLAYERS: 1-2 (cooperative)
LEVELS: 25

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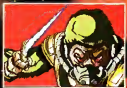
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THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of a variety of entertainment software reviewers from around the country. Their critical appraisals of the latest software releases are presented here.

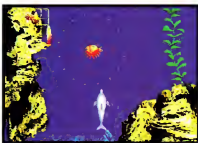
	John Baker Seattle	Mike Casper Houston	David Cohen Boston	John Decker Dallas	Steve Engel Portland	John Hart New York
Alien vs. Predator	A-	B	A	A-		
Adv. of Batman	B-	C	C+	B		
Beyond Oasis	-	C+	C+	A		
Boogerman	B-	C-	B	C		
Brandish	B-	B-	B+	-		
Burn: Cycle	-	C+	B-	-		
Cadillacs/Dinosaurs	C+	C+	B	D-		
Demolition Man	A	A-	A	B		
Demon's Crest	B+	A-	A	B+		
Donkey Kong Country	A+	A+	A+	A+		
Dynamite Headdy	B	B	A	-		
Earthworm Jim	B+	A-	B-	A-		
Final Fantasy III	A	A+	A+	A-		
Illusion of Gaea	B+	B	A	B+		
Immercenary	A-	B+	A	C-		
Indiana Jones G.A.	B	B-	B	-		
Iron Soldier	A-	-	A	B+		
Izzy's Quest	B	-	B	-		
Jungle Book	A-	A	A	B+		
Kasumi Ninja	C-	F	D	D+		
LaRossa Baseball '95	C+	C	C+	-		
Lion King, The	A-	A	A	B+		
Metal Head	C	-	B+	D-		
Mickey Mania	A	A	A	A		
Need for Speed	A-	B+	B+	B+		
Pac Attack	B	A-	A	C		
Phantasy Star IV	B	C+	B-	B		
Pitfall: Mayan Adv.	B+	A	B+	-		
Punch-Out	B-	B-	B-	B-		
Rise of the Robots	B-	C+	B+	C-		
Ristar	A	B	A-	A		
Shockwave	B+	B+	A	B+		
Slayer	B-	C	B	C+		
Starfleet Academy	A	A	A	A-		
Supreme Warrior	B	C	B	C+		
Syndicate	B	B-	B+	B		
Unracers	A-	A	A	A		
Way of the Warrior	A+	A	A	D		
X-Men	C+	C-	B	B		



Following in the footsteps of *Road Rash*, *Need for Speed* satisfies speed freaks.

Ecco Jr. (Sega Club/Genesis) Ecco Jr. really clicks. He and his oceanic friends are on an Endless Sea quest to find Big Blue, the friendly giant whale. To locate the whale, however, Ecco must complete a series of missions and open the Crystal Doors that section off the ocean. The eight game types—ranging from Scavenger Hunt to Rescue—encourage the development of skills for children's future education.

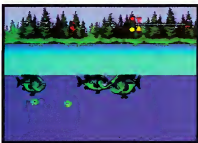
The Parent Mode permits free sea exploration, and a database of dolphin facts and lore. The graphics, music and



sound effects are superb and developer Novotrade Interactive should be highly commended for an excellent job. Ecco Jr. is definitely edutainment at its finest. **A** (Laurie Yates)

Bass Masters Classic (T*HQ/SNES)

Almost as exciting as real fishing. Created in conjunction with the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S. Inc.) BMC is probably the most realistic



3-D fishing game ever created. It's loaded with lots of product placement (Johnson and Evirude outboard motors, Ranger boats and trailers plus Eagle fishfinders) and authentic fishing action (if that's not an oxymoron). The graphics are first rate, and there's nothing to dislike about the game play, but the attraction is to a niche market. How much you like Bass Masters Classic will depend on how much you like the real thing. **B-** (John W. Hardin)

Kirby's Dream Course (Nintendo/SNES)

An utterly charming variation on miniature golf crossed with billiards that stars Nintendo's cute, cloudy character, Kirby. Originally introduced to the industry in '92 as Special Tee Shot, the project was put on the back burner until

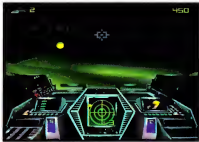
it could be populated with the Kirby cast members.

There's a little golf, a little bagatelle and a little action. (Kirby runs into stunned, stationary enemies to collect



bonus points.) When the golf ball strikes the last remaining enemy, that character is transformed into the hole, adding an interesting layer of strategy to the play. The Two-player Option is especially cool, since you can actually steal power-ups from your opponent! **A** (Bill Kunkel)

Hoverstrike (Atari/Jaguar) Atari strikes out yet again with this embarrassing Shockwave wanna-be. The problems: The enemies are few and far between (mostly structures), and while the gravity varies among the different scenarios (for no discernable reason), all these



areas look almost exactly the same, except for some superficial color changes. There are also the usual collection of weapons and power-ups, but the grainy graphics, and outrageous pixelation show just how far this vaunted 64-Bit system really is from a state-of-the-art 3DO product. **C-** (Bill Kunkel)

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, Crossroads of Time (Playmates/SNES) Players guide Commander Sisko, the polymorphous policeman Odo and other DS9 crew members through eight missions to save



the far-flung space station from Cardassian maliciousness. Trek all over the large space station, battling saboteurs and solving puzzles, then leave the DS9 confines to continue the game on Bajor and the Starship Saratoga. Things come to a climax on board a Cardassian ship. The emphasis is mostly on puzzle solving, but there is enough phaser slinging and runabout piloting to lighten the brain work. Sisko can use various items, and Odo can morph into liquid form and the form of a Bajoran Cave Rat (why not?). ST:DS9 is not going to challenge any industry standards in sound or graphics, but for trekophiles, it should be very satisfying. **++** (John Wesley Hardin)

Wayne Gretzky NHLPA All-Stars (TWI/Genesis) These days, sports fans decide to buy games based on key factors. First is the game's POV: Is the action displayed from an angled, vertically



scrolling perspective (e.g., the EA Sports NHL series), a topdown view (as in Bethesda's early Gretzky games) or an angled side view? The latter format was popular in the '80s, but there were too many visual problems with puck visibility against the forward boards. This latest Gretzky game revives the angled side POV, and while it overcomes most of the older visual problems, its major difficulty is the lack of an NHL license. So the players are real, but logos and uniforms are ludicrously bogus. **++** (Bill Kunkel)

Zaxxon 2000: Motherbase (Sega/32X) Remember Zaxxon? In the early '80s, this flying shooter's non-interactive 3-D background was as breathtaking and original as the diagonal overhead perspective. Thirteen years later, a permutation of the original arrives on the 32X. Now, instead of flying one ship against and around enemy planes, missile launchers and electrical fields, gamers pilot a random assortment of craft against enemy planes, giant robots and UFOs. The player flies a small command module that can attach to and control assorted allied and enemy craft, each with different weapons and capabilities. The command module is armed, but not as well as any of the ships that

can be co-opted, so knowing when to jump to which fighter is a vital survival skill in Motherbase. As befitting Zaxxon's three-dimensional background, everything here is rendered in shaded polygons and there's lots of eye candy to show off the capabilities of the hardware. While this attempt to update a classic doesn't seem particularly fresh or cutting edge, it is fun to play. **B-** (John W. Hardin)

Brutal: Above the Law (Gameltek/32X)

Here's the next installment in the Brutal anthropomorphic fighting animal dynasty. Players can play all of the critters from previous installments, plus characters who were hidden in the original game. New options add some variety to the contests and all the options that made the game so flexible are still here, as is the excellent, frenetic soundtrack. Unfortunately, also still here are the rather stiff controls and limited sound effects that have marred these furious fuzzy fighters from the start. **++** (John W. Hardin)

Wolverine: Adamantium Rage (LJN/SNES)

Logan, a.k.a. Wolverine, the most gut-driven of the X-Men, seeks his lost identity on a quest. Apparently, everyone means to prevent him from finding out who he is. This is a graphically average platform game, where the player must puzzle out Wolverine's way from level to level, battling baddies and bosses along the way. Taking a leaf from fighting games, he has a wide variety of moves, using most of the SNES controller buttons (optionally



reconfigurable) in various combinations. Most are fighting moves, but with some he can jump to the ceiling or walls, cling and jump from there—and he'll often have to use that capability. X-Men game fans should find this absorbing and challenging, but newcomers to the series may quickly get frustrated. **B** (Ross Chamberlain)

Kawasaki Super Bike Challenge (Time Warner Interactive/Genesis)

Despite the title, this is a straightforward racer, concentrating on the race rather than the mechanics. The exceptions are unrelated to the specific machine: Weather can be

a factor in selecting appropriate tires, the gearing may be set high or low and the shift may be manual or automatic.



The viewpoint is from low behind the instrument panel; the view itself is a colorful, polygon-based trackscape with considerable detail. There are 14 international tracks on the circuit (the player may skip some) plus the Suzuka Eight-Hour Endurance course. Race game fans will find much that is familiar, with subtle differences in handling compared to four-wheel sims. **B** (Ross Chamberlain)

QuaranTeen (By Gametek/3DO) The life of a cabbie in the year 2022 is a rough one indeed. At least half the people on



the streets of this quarantined prison-city are crazed psychokillers. The player must operate the hovercab and keep a finger on the trigger of the weapons bank. What a way to make a living! The action is hot and heavy, the speed effects are nausea-inducing and the overall result is exciting. There are a lot of things to control, which keeps the pace fast. However, wheeling around the corners at such speeds does make the picture pixelate a lot. **B** (Joyce Worley)

Hagane (Hudson Soft/SNES) At first glance this is a yawner: another side-scrolling action/fighting Japanese robot ninja game. Then after playing it a bit, the game becomes ... addictive. If your first instinct is to dismiss it, try it and see what happens. You'll be gasping in awe of yourself as Hagane journeys through a post-apocalyptic future, executing incredible special moves. The graphics are not amazing, but they serve the purpose, and the programming is good, with "smart" enemies (for the most part) and flawless controls. Worth a look. **B+** (John Hardin)



HALF-BAKED SCI-FI

Origin's *Bioforge* offers yet another reason to shoot your PC!

There are some people in this industry whom I have come to truly pity over the years. It's hard, for example, not to feel a sharp tinge of sympathy for the many remnants of once-mighty publishers who have been absorbed by bigger fish, drained of life, then left to rot on the Infobahn's roadside. They still live, like comatose patients attached to life-support systems, but the essence of what made them legends is now only a memory. Then there are the pathetic fools who take on tasks such as writing a strategy book based on 3-D mapping models like *Descent*.

But the people I feel the most gut-wrenching empathy for are the customer support people at Origin.

Let's look back at Origin and try to put this picture in perspective. The company started out small and simple, like most of its competitors in the days when software was packaged in baggies with crude sheets of title paper. But it was driven by the vision of a brilliant RPG game designer who called himself "Lord British." His father was an astronaut, his mother an artist. He is an intuitive genius who claims to have read no more than five books in his entire life. His series was eventually translated into

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Origin
DESIGNER: ???
SYSTEM: PC-DOS CD
THEME: Sci-Fi
HD SPACE: 30.6 Meg
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A

video game format, and he soon found himself being mobbed by fans during his visits to Japan. Shortly the company was raking in millions from its *Ultima* cash cow, driven solely by one man's brilliant vision of how to translate a compelling fantasy RPG into the primitive computer and video game formats of the day. The *Ultima* games which appeared on the C64 may have required longer load times than the Sega Channel, but they were good games.

Then came the PC, with its promise of ultimate gaming power. The system evolved constantly—from 286 to 386 to 486 to 486/66 to Pentium, to Pentium 100s and on and on (much like Marvel Comics' superheel Ultron, an evil robot that basically started out in life as an ambitious vacuum cleaner but

continually reinvented, redefined and reconstructed itself into newer and ever more intimidating incarnations).

At some point in the ongoing evolution, Origin stopped being the *Ultima* company and became the *Wing Commander* company. This represented a significant difference on both ends of the spectrum. *Ultima* could no longer be generated by a single creator, no matter how brilliant. Now entire teams were required to meld his Lordship's constantly evolving, ever more sophisticated storytelling with the state-of-the-art



RPG sound and graphics now required to sell *any* product on the PC. The changing marketplace was driving the company away from fantasyland and into the world of ultra-realistic, state-of-

the-art sci-fi modeling. Every scrap of ray-tracing technology and Gouraud polygons that could be stuffed onto a floppy (or a couple dozen floppies, if necessary) was jammed into these games, from the WC series to games



such as *Privateer*. Unfortunately, these changes led Origin in some unfortunate directions. Games were advertised as playable on systems that were nowhere heavy duty enough to handle its monster-sized programs.

So we got great innovations (anyone remember "Voodoo"?), none of which were ever compatible with anything or anyone else in the industry. Origin seemed determined to reinvent the wheel, and the result has been a series of the most frustrating software programs ever released.

Which brings us, at last, to *Bioforge* (and my sympathy for those customer support people in Austin). Based on my own personal reaction to every SF game Origin has ever produced for PC format, I would surmise these poor support folk get to experience a lot of rage and frustration during the course of their working lives. After all, how does one explain to someone with a 486/66 and 16-Meg of RAM—which is supposed to run *Bioforge* like a well-tuned automobile, if not exactly a Ferrari—that their machine's sound card (which was, of course, bundled with their machine and is compatible with nothing north of an Adlib) is of poor moral character—or creates an IRQ problem, or perhaps they just don't have enough Advanced Extended Stretched Out Mega-Memory?

Bioforge is a game that devours more than 30-Meg of hard drive space in order to deliver a frequently clumsy combination of an RPG and one of those interactive movies that are so *en vogue* these days. There's plenty of hot-looking graphics, flashes of animated brilliance, a square-jawed story line and plenty of player commands. In fact, there are 11 general commands, three monitor settings and an incredible 14 movement commands—not to mention the combat, with nine hand- and nine foot-based attacks. Even *Street Fighter II* fans, however, will not enjoy having to tap out several keyboard-based commands in rapid sequence to deliver a

single back flip or a "left super body blow." The numeric pad can also be used for character movement and combat, but except for the first of four attack templates, all moves must be invoked while simultaneously holding the Shift, Alt or Ctrl keys.

Of course, presuming you survive the installation and learning curve, the greater question becomes: Is it worth the trip? The story line has more bromides than a pharmacy, but the missions are well-designed, and even if they're not always original, they work. The graphics are pretty close to top of the line, with two dozen combat animations, plenty of cool weapons and eight-channel "smart" digital sound effects. Smart sound means that the game situation cues the program as to which music or sound it should generate; if the character is approaching a closed door, the sound effects and music create tension. If there



is no danger once the door is opened, the audio reflects the dissipation of that threat. There are plenty of camera angles and much more interaction than most special effects-driven games would even dream of. The characters were all texture mapped based on real people, and we even get to see their gory

TAKE A DEEPER LOOK

While it isn't perfect—and you've already been warned that the installation process is likely to induce those familiar Origin heebie-jeebies [see review]—it would be a mistake to ignore *Bioforge*, which is what many gamers will do once they check out the horrible package art. The cover looks like a fluoroscopic green X-ray of a three-fingered hand with an opposable thumb. Above this image the title of the game appears, in small, easy-to-ignore letters.

So before you judge this game by its awful cover, dig the great screen shots on the back of the box, and if you've still got the guts to try to boot and play it—even on your 486/66 (so what if the credits take a minute to run?)—go for it, dude!



injuries as they absorb hits. Cool.

One of the game's gimmicks, however, falls flatter than a paper cup moving through a black hole.

The program offers something called "variable identity outcomes." The player-character, you see, is a cyborg, an experimental subject who had his or her memory wiped and then received the very best in bio-commando enhancement. As a result, when the game starts out, the p-c has no recollection of a prior identity. (Stop me if you've heard this one before...)

Ah, but which of several experimental subjects did the player-character used to be? While you might want to ask someone who actually gives a damn, the reality is that the decisions the player makes during the course of the game somehow provides the information regarding who your character used to be. This is pretentious silliness that has no place whatsoever in a game like this. Since p-cs have no memory, they are essentially nobody. What reward is there in discovering whether you were transformed from Tom Cruise or Homer Simpson? This is the kind of gimmick that might've sounded good during a late-night skull session, but should have been deleted by the first person who arrived at the office the next morning.

This review has taken a hard look at *Bioforge*, but that's only because it is so close to being a very good game. The execution of the sound and graphics and, in fact, the overall audio-visual aspects of the game are superb. Unfortunately, the designers seem to have fallen victim to some overly ambitious notions, and when the time came to fashion an interface that would work with the game's incredibly diverse and eclectic elements—from puzzle solving to street fighting—the entire project seems to have fallen apart.

Although the documentation we received was impressively extensive, complete with excellent walkthroughs and quickstart documents, there was no mention of joystick implementation, even for such button-heavy controller monsters as the Gravis' Phoenix. Confining play on a game as action-oriented as *Bioforge*, unfortunately, removed its last shot at excellence.

✦ (Bill Kunkel)

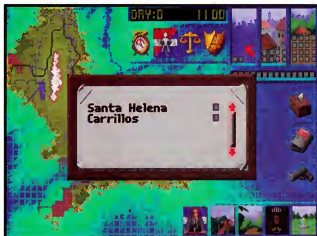
MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Play with a nation's politics in *Central Intelligence*

Every once in a while a player comes across a game that brings back memories. In the case of Ocean's recent entry, *Central Intelligence*, the memories stirred, unfortunately, are those best forgotten. The problem is a graphical interface that reminds a player of computer

gaming circa 1990, instead of 1995. While Ocean tries to spruce things up with some FMV clips, the video just makes a player pine for other updated elements ... like elegant graphics, compelling game play and some semblance of ease of use.

To be fair, the back of the packaging warns off inexperienced players, touting *Central Intelligence* as a product "recommended for experienced gamers." The problem is that most experienced gamers won't find much to enjoy in



non-sentence: "It is your choice which mission you choose the task ahead." Later in the manual the player is advised that "The message no mission possible with current selection" appears often in the game but does not necessarily mean the mission is not possible." The subsequent manual text makes no effort to explain why the game does this or what the player is supposed to do about it. Yes, that particular message does appear far too often, but how to get around it? No help is provided. Ouch.

Stepping back, *Central Intelligence* is a resource management game with an elaborate espionage theme that offers a truly compelling premise. The player is sent in by U.S. intelligence to restore democracy to the tiny island republic of São Madrigal, lying near the coast of Brazil. It is one of the area's largest oil and petro-chemical producers. A fascist dictator has taken control of the island in a bloody military coup. The new "president" has denounced the U.S., and is forming close ties and trade agreements with China. The intelligence community believes that the new junta received funding and support for the coup from the Chinese.

The player's job is to command a team of agents on the island to enable an opposition force to overthrow the junta, establishing a new democratic government—presumably with friendly ties to the U.S. The player is assigned three specialists who each have command over a team of eight agents, trained in propaganda, political espionage and paramilitary operations, respectively.

The player can send the agents out on a variety of missions to forward the goal of toppling the junta. The player's first move is to get an agent to the headquarters of the opposition, the player's ally, to spy and gather intelligence. The player's basic mission options are to spy and move agents to particular buildings or sites on the island. More elaborate missions include gathering (stealing) various material resources, destroying the resources of the enemy and spreading the good word through propaganda efforts. The player is also responsible for sharing gathered intelligence with various opposition forces on the island.

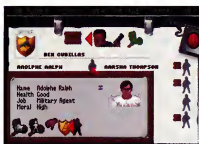
The player's allies include various members of the opposition party, the opposition leader, rebel forces and student sympathizers and local leadership. The opposition leader is the man destined to be the legitimate president if the effort is a success. The rebel forces are the paramilitary units that lead the attack on the presidential palace when the time comes to remove El Dictator. Student sympathizers are a powerful means of spreading propaganda.

Central Intelligence offers a truly expansive simulation. There are over 1,300 simulated "characters" in the game, basically the entire population of the island! Numerous cities, towns and hamlets come complete with a set of buildings that can be examined and the materials within stolen, moved or destroyed if the need arises.

It's a shame Ocean didn't send this one back to the drawing boards, because the internal engine of the game seems to hold a lot of promise. There are a lot of variables to contend with, and it's likely resource management fans would have had their hands pleasantly full with *Central Intelligence* had the designers rethought the interface.

Unfortunately, even after hours of game play, it's difficult to get a real sense of how the various elements on the island are interacting, and what impact, if any, the player is having on the flow of events.

A follow-up product with a new user interface would be worth a look, but as it stands, *Central Intelligence* plays more like "Mission Impossible"—for all the wrong reasons. **D (David Gerding)**



Central Intelligence if they figure out how to play, and inexperienced gamers are likely not to get that far. Again, the user interface is the culprit. It's painfully difficult to get things done. It's also difficult to figure out what's going on. By the time a player gets the hang of things, much of the fun is lost.

The manual is at least as much to blame for the poor game play experience as is the user interface. An ill-conceived layout makes it very difficult to follow. There are also some nearly comical grammatical errors and illogical assertions, including the following

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Ocean
DESIGNER: Ocean
SYSTEM: PC (CD-ROM)
THEME: Spy Management
HD SPACE: 6 MB
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A

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ANOTHER JOB FOR THE B.A.T. MAN

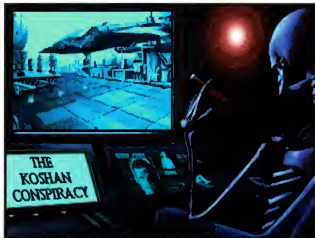
Off-world espionage with flair in *The Koshan Conspiracy*

It's pretty easy to spot games that have been crafted in Europe, especially those from la belle France. They're either elegant and innovative (*Alone in the Dark*) or totally bizarre and febrile (remember *Captain Blood*?). Either way they're entertaining, although sometimes mysteriously so.

Ubi Soft's new enhanced CD-ROM version of *The Koshan Conspiracy* (also known as *B.A.T. II*) is a perfect example of both instances. It's basically a science-fiction adventure game but it also contains four flight simulators, a driving simulator, three arcade games and two types of combat.

One might assume that these varied elements would make for a slightly schizophrenic experience but, surprisingly, they work quite well in the framework of a convincingly alien experience that fits somewhere in between *Blade Runner* and *Dune*.

The year is 2179 and players assume the role of Jehan Menasis, an agent of the ultra-secret Bureau of Astral



II, which is a "High Tech Paradox" of early Roman culture and modern extraterrestrial architecture, he meets with B.A.T. contact Sylvia Hadford. She is an exotic beauty with the husky voice of a female impersonator. Sylvia provides him with essential equipment and his mission agenda.

Then it's off to explore the city and get to know its more than 250 characters. Through idle chitchat, cagey commerce, luck and a bit of thievery, our hero can accumulate extra money, information and assorted electronic and organic accouterments.

Roma II is composed of six sectors connected by a series of suspended high-speed highways called Via-Expresses (the driving simulator). The sixth sector, called "the City," is a complex of towering office buildings accessible only by means of a Mosquito flying taxi (one of the flight simulators, looking very much like Konami's *The Killing Cloud*).

The city's inhabitants comprise three different races: Shedish, intelligent simians; Ilyens, less-intelligent simians and humans, known as Romans.

One of the CD-ROM's many enhancements is complete vocalization of all social encounters. Each character one meets has a distinct voice and personality and some of the monotony of asking the same questions over and over is quelled by hearing familiar responses spoken with a different attitude and accent. To be sure, although the game boasts over 250 characters,

many appear to be clones, and the B.A.T. agent will meet the same, but "different" people many times.

The game is presented in what its designers call a Dynorama. Rather than simply switching screens with each new location, KCCD uses a graphic system that often resembles a comic book. The main screen is sometimes divided into three or four panels, each of which becomes active when the player-character enters its location. The mouse pointer becomes a "dynamic icon" when passed over hotspots, indicating what kind of action can be taken. It's also possible to scroll the scenery within some of these panels.

In an eerie, unintentional nod to Microsoft's upcoming "family" PC interface, the Bureau provides every agent with a B.O.B. (originally a Biodirectional Organic Bioputer, now unaccountably renamed a B.A.T. Organizer with Biochips) in his left arm. B.O.B. monitors and controls the agent's life signs by way of simple programs written in a graphical language called Parallel Token. It's not necessary to learn how to program B.O.B., but doing so greatly increases the agent's chances of survival.

The Koshan Conspiracy was quite unique even in its original 17-Megabyte floppy release a couple of years ago. Its

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft

DESIGNER: Holku Studio

SYSTEM: PC CD

THEME: Adventure/RPG

HD SPACE: 3 MB

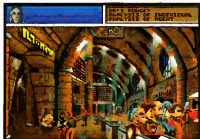
PLAYERS: 1

LEVELS: N/A

unusual presentation and enveloping alien feel were sustained by a constant shower of convincing and original sound effects, now augmented by the aforementioned speech and a splendid CD audio score.

The game's original graphics look a bit dated now compared to the outstanding graphics available today, but the other CD-ROM enhancements—expansive new introduction and 3-D animations, hypertext-highlighted speech balloons, a complete on-line manual and help system and even a printed walkthrough—help support what is essentially still a very strong game.

The Koshan Conspiracy is not actually an easy game, though, nor is it particularly intuitive. It is a game that requires an amount of dedication and a certain period of acclimation, after which it is meant more to be lived than played. **B-** (Scott Wolf)



Troubleshooters (B.A.T.) sent to the planet Shedishan to crush the Koshan monopoly of Echiatone 21, the planet's single most valuable resource.

Players select either a predefined agent or create one themselves. When he arrives in the Shedishan city of Roma

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FIRST-PERSON GALACTIC

Face the *Dark Forces* behind the *Star Wars* saga

Many players and editors alike have referred to *Dark Forces* as "LucasArts' *Doom* game." This phrase not only compliments id Software's *Doom* series in a backhanded way, but it also unfairly compares *Dark Forces* to a game that is nothing like it in either scope or implementation.

With *Dark Forces*, LucasArts has once again reinterpreted the fascinating universe of George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga in a unique way that eclipses other 3-D games because of both the subject matter and the approach.

If there were no Stormtroopers on the box cover, players might not realize from the title that *Dark Forces* is a *Star Wars* game. It's not based on a movie and it doesn't use the name of a character or equipment from a movie in its



important missions. Players control the game from Katarn's point of view amid a variety of new locations, 20 enemies and eight different weapons. The first mission places Katarn in an important place in *Star Wars* history: It is he who must steal the secret plans for the construction of the Death Star and relay them back to Rebel leaders. After this familiar topic, players uncover a plot to develop a new line of super-powerful "dark troopers" that are certain to eliminate the remainder of the Rebel fleet. The missions get more intricate and take place in a variety of locations, from mines to Jabba the Hutt's space cruiser.

The interface has so many nice touches that there's no room to list them here. There are three important elements to note: the realistic, dynamic 3-D game environment; mission subgoals and story elements and a superimposed map. *Dark Forces* has one of the nicest 3-D worlds of any game. Not only does it have familiar elements from the *Star Wars* universe, but it also features a realistic number of enemies, a lived-in feel and painstaking detail. For example, Stormtroopers and other enemies don't fire until they actually see Katarn and only while he's within range. Flashing lights, spaceship fly-bys, guards on duty and locked doors suggest locations that will not just react to the player, but will actually thrive without him.

The game controls are a bit different for those used to other 3-D games, programmed for a variety of primary controls. Movement is smooth through the

beautifully rendered backgrounds. Each weapon serves a different purpose in *Dark Forces*, so players should not use them at random. Ammunition is not as readily available as in other games.

The ability to look up and down brings in the scope of each level and also reveals strategies for the defeat of enemies around corners, on ledges, etc.

The game play involves both an overall goal and subgoals like a *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*. A Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) accesses the mission briefings, a list of goals that are highlighted when completed. So there's more to life than making it to the end of the level. Puzzles, locked doors and special items appear along the way. Subgoals develop the plot, expanding the game play beyond simple survival. The PDA also brings up a rather innovative and necessary tool—the automap, which stays right on the screen on a transparent layer over the game action. This is important when relentless Imperial soldiers are right on the heels of the player.

Dark Forces features the same high level of graphics, sound effects and music of its predecessors. LucasArts' patented cinematic "cut-scenes" tell the story, but the normal game play graphics are far more impressive. Players will enjoy their dynamic explorations of the most complex *Star Wars* game world ever created. The music is intense and takes its cues from the game locations and current level of action. The sound effects are familiar, but the game would not be the same without them. Speech peppers the game for that last layer of realism and atmosphere.

The only weakness is the lack of replayability. Once players know where the important items and hidden enemies are located in a level, the surprise is gone. Although *Dark Forces* is an action game, the plot and missions are the vehicle for that action. The lack of save games makes it more difficult, but also more realistic; it forces players to think and be more careful.

Players should turn down the lights and let themselves slip completely into the role. Every exciting minute is as close as they will get to Stormtroopers, killer robots and the porcine Gamorrean guards. ■ (Russ Ceccola)



title. But the game is intimately involved in the details of the popular trilogy from a behind-the-scenes point of view. LucasArts may never run out of games from the first trilogy, let alone the prequels set to begin in 1997. After the huge success of *X-Wing*, *Rebel Assault* and *TIE Fighter*, it's no surprise that LucasArts has already sold tens of thousands of this latest game in the *Star Wars* saga.

Dark Forces introduces Rebel Alliance special agent Kyle Katarn, an important man with a series of

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DESIGNER: Doran Stinnett
SYSTEM: PC-CD
THEME: 3-D Graphic Adventure
HD SPACE: 10 MB
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 12

Silverload

**Welcome To Silverload,
A Devil Of A Town.**

Folks don't come to Silverload much anymore. A'int been no silver here in years. And when they do come, they don't stay any longer than they have to. Missing persons? No, mister, a'int never seen no missing persons. Of course, folks here don't pay much attention to strangers. Have a look around? Can't say anybody will stop you from looking around, mister. Except the last man who came here looking for kin is buried over there on that hill.



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CORPORATE MERCENARIES

Go to the *Frontlines* for near-future war action

Frontlines is a game of tactical warfare in the not-too-distant future. With the exception of airpower, noticeably absent from this model, most of the current combined arms mix is in place.

Some logical extensions of these capabilities are also present. In addition to conventional tanks, players will have command of a limited number of hover-tanks. One of the light ones, the Ferret, might be considered a substitute for traditional airpower in the game. If this is what was in the designer's mind, however, the concept falls short.

Additionally, Artillery includes long-range, rocket-launched rounds and some infantry units enjoy tech-armor suits. When these additional trappings are peeled back, players find that **Frontlines** is a fairly straightforward small-unit, tactical simulation.

The premise revolves around the rise of several mega-corporations during a protracted period of peace. Once these power structures are in place, they decide that the world would be better served by their undisputed rulership, rather than the loosely structured economic collective that exists. It's the age-old story of absolute power corrupting absolutely. Although the conventional armies of the world fall swiftly in the



face of these mercenary onslaughts, the various corporations and factions cannot decide among themselves on the final power structure. Otherwise, there would be no game.

As things stand, players will not enjoy the ability to side with any given power base and see it through a campaign of conquest, a la **Mechwarrior**. One only participates as a mercenary leader with no empathetic presence or alter ego in the game. Players simply assume command of a group of units and see them through the current mis-

sion. After a game like **Panzer General**, in which players develop units over time and actually begin to care about their progress, this is a step backward.

Frontlines does offer a great many scenarios, however, that will keep beginning and intermediate level wargamers busy for a long time. The scenarios are grouped by level of difficulty: easy, medium or hard. In general (there are exceptions), the harder scenarios are less a case of a challenging force mix than simply trying to coordinate the actions of many more units over a broader front.

The **Frontlines** game map is divided into a grid of hexes, like traditional wargames. If desired, players may toggle off the hexsides to provide a cleaner playing field, similar to those used in the **V for Victory** series. Each hex represents about 150 meters from edge to edge. The actual scenario maps vary in size, from a minimum of 20 by 20 hexes up to 100 by 100 hexes. Each hex is represented by a specific piece of terrain that, in turn, affects both the movement rate and defensive modifiers for any unit that occupies that hex.

Easy scenarios tend to occur on smaller maps, and the total mix of units might be analogous to a Company-size action. At medium difficulty, players assume command of a Battalion of assets and attempt to coordinate them to achieve a series of objectives. Also, these battles tend to play out on slightly larger maps, to afford the commander a broader scheme of maneuver. Regimental actions, at the hardest difficulty setting, are usually fought over a large segment of the front. In these larger actions, players can spend as long as 10 minutes waiting on a single turn while the computer moves units.

Fire and movement is at the heart of every good tactical simulation, and **Frontlines** actually handles these elements well. Each turn represents about one minute of real time and is further subdivided into movement and combat phases for each side. During each movement phase, the opposing player has an opportunity to fire on units that attempt to move within range. Units that fire on these targets of opportunity may not fire in the subsequent combat phase. Also, combat resolution can occur as plotted

or simultaneously for all units at the end of plotting. The latter lends a more realistic feel to the game.

Advanced Options enhance the realism of the game. Enabling Fog of War imposes line-of-sight restrictions on all units. Artillery is still capable of indirect fire but requires another unit in line of sight of the targeted unit to spot the fall of shot. The Quality Option allows unit experience to contribute to the base percentage chance to hit during combat, lowers loss of morale and also decreases the chance of disruption.

Disruption is yet another advanced option. When enabled, any successful attack has a possibility of scattering and disorganizing the targeted unit so that it will be unable to conduct its own attack in the same round.

Players who enjoy creating their own designs will be thoroughly impressed with the included scenario builder. Impressions included every possible tool for budding designers, from tile and



terrain placement to the ability to edit individual unit statistics. Changing these attributes can alter the feel of the entire game. Designers can also specify the Combat Odds for a given scenario. This subjective modifier is used to roll many diverse factors such as weather, visibility and so forth, into a single ratio that directly affects the lethality of all units. A higher setting increases the success level of all attacks; a lower setting increases the chance of misses.

Frontlines certainly does not redefine the genre of tactical simulation, but it is a solid offering in a field much less crowded than that of grand strategic wargaming. However, it could have been much better with a campaign option and the ability to build a core group of forces and develop them over time. **B-** (Ed Dille)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Impressions
DESIGNER: Chris Foster
SYSTEM: PC (CD-ROM)
THEME: Strategy
HD SPACE: 9 MB
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: N/A

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TRAINS, PLANES & AUTOMOBILES

Find out what it takes to be a *Transport Tycoon*

Take rural America, throw in a handful of small towns populated by a few hundred hicks, add three or so greedy capitalists intent on industrializing the region by controlling the transportation of goods, merchandise and people and the result is *Transport Tycoon*. Inspired by MicroProse's *Railroad Tycoon*, *Transport Tycoon* uses not just railroads but buses, trucks and airplanes as well to facilitate the player's capitalist goal of economic sovereignty.

Essentially, *TT* contains two games in one. First, starting in 1930, the player must use borrowed money to establish a network to transport goods and personnel between isolated communities, factories and other industrial centers. Initially, players race to tap various commodities—coal, iron, oil, wood, etc.—and transport them to awaiting buyers. Secondly, after defining these trade routes, the players progress through the years maintaining efficient transport by modernizing their vehicle inventory. As time passes, newer, faster (but not necessarily better) vehicles become available. Players struggle to maintain sufficient cash to purchase more modern trains, planes and automobiles. Most routes



take time to mature, losing money for a few months (or years) before becoming profitable.

Players must carefully manage their spending and expansion during this period. Expansion requires money, which initially requires loans. Depending on the difficulty options, the bank has a maximum value it will loan to each player. Players must avoid tapping out their credit limit before their routes become self-sustaining. Interest payments on a \$600,000 debt can quickly bankrupt an aspiring tycoon.

Local city governments also pose problems to the would-be tycoon. Cities

may not always allow the type of construction the player requires. A local government may restrict players from tearing down various structures to make room for newer facilities, or may restrict certain types (such as airports) altogether. Sometimes, a well-timed advertising campaign (that costs from \$17,000 to over \$70,000 depending on options) may sway the politician's mind. In the worst case, a \$200,000 grant to rebuild all streets in the town often does wonders for a politician's attitude. Sometimes, though, the competition has already greased the government's palm and the player can only watch in frustration.

Politicians occasionally work for the player, though, by offering substantial cash subsidies to the first tycoon to provide a particular service. For example, a city may offer to pay triple bus fare for a year to the first tycoon who supplies a bus route between two specified points.

TT also includes an international flavor. Currency can be dollars, deutsche marks, pounds or yen, and *TT* uses a fixed "currency exchange rate" that alters starting cash balances and equipment costs to maintain fairness. Additionally, players may choose whether the default city names conform to typical U.S., English, European, etc., conventions. In any event, players may alter the names of cities to more familiar names.

Players view the world from an airborne, 3-D perspective, similar to that used in *Sid Meier's Civilization*. Trains, aircraft and automobiles move along their defined routes accompanied by whistles, horns and an allotment of other sounds. The cute moving pieces and sound effects make for a cheery, entertaining feel.

Competition kills. A profitable airline can be devastated when a competitor initiates an aggressive advertising campaign and opens a shiny new airport across town. Aesthetic landscaping improvements and continued advertising significantly improve business.

TT isn't perfect, though. The sparse manual glosses over numerous topics, giving a totally unsatisfactory explanation of the various vehicles. The interface, while easy to use, is window happy. Numerous small pop-up windows clutter the display. Moving around the world is extremely annoying. Maps

scroll at lethargic rate guaranteed not to cause motion sickness. The city index will immediately center the view of any selected city, but doesn't provide information on where the city lies relative to any other point on the map.

TT dutifully announces when vehicles become too old to complete their functions reliably. Players may send the specified vehicles back to the depot, then sell them off for scrap and launch a new vehicle. Unfortunately, there appears to be no easy way to copy orders from the retiree to the replacement. If a player happens to sell the retiree before issuing orders to the new vehicle, there's no way to determine what the old vehicle's orders were. If the previous vehicle's route was particularly profitable, the player stands to lose substantial revenue.



TT only partially acknowledges the concept of land ownership. Once an item or structure is built, the player owns the land it's built on. Before the completion, though, the land is up for grabs. It's not unusual to landscape a particular area for a road, then suddenly find the area being disruptively relandscaped before the road's completion.

Random events, from train crashes to random mechanical breakdowns to mysterious collisions with an occasional UFO, deplete the player's inventory. Unfortunately, the program doesn't always make these events completely clear. News reports indicate that an accident happened, but do not always advise who received the blow or where the accident took place.

Balancing ease of entry with sufficient economic complexity, *TT* is an entertaining and extremely addictive product, certain to provide many hours of transportation entertainment. **B**
(Tom Basham)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: MicroProse
DESIGNER: Chris Sawyer
SYSTEM: PC CD
THEME: Economic Conquest
HD SPACE: 3 MB
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: N/A

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REVIEWS

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of a variety of entertainment software reviewers from around the country. Their critical appraisals of the latest software releases are presented here.

	Jack Van Der Burg	David Caine Shelton	John Gibson	John Gibson	John Gibson
Aces of the Deep	B+	B+	B+	B+	B+
Air Rave Control	B-	C	B-	-	-
Alone in the Dark II	A	A	A+	C	-
Armored Fist	A	B+	A	B-	-
Blake Stone	C	D	-	C	-
Commander Blood	C-	F	D	-	-
Club Dead	B+	B	B-	-	-
Colonization	A-	A	B	A	B+
Creature Shock	B	B	B-	B	-
Cyberia	A-	A-	B	B+	-
Dark Sun II	B	B	B	-	-
Descent	A-	B+	A	A+	-
Doom II	A-	A-	A	B+	-
Dragon Lore	B	B	-	-	-
Flight Commander II	B	-	B	-	-
Global Domination	B	B	A	-	-
Hammer of the Gods	B	B	B	-	-
Hell	B-	B	C+	-	-
Hired Gun	C	C-	-	C+	-
Kix and Play	A-	B	A+	A-	-
Master of Magic	-	B-	A	A	-
Menzoberranzan	B-	C+	B-	-	-
Metaltek: Earthsiege	B+	-	B+	C-	-
Nigel Mansell's	B-	C	C+	-	-
Operation Crusader	B+	B	B	-	-
Pacific Strike	A-	B	A-	B	-
Power Poker	C+	C-	B	B	-
Rebelfess: Twinson	B	C	-	B	-
Renegade	B	C+	B	-	-
Shadows of Coln	B-	B	B	-	-
SimTower	B+	A-	B-	B+	-
Siam City	B+	B-	A	B+	-
Star Reach	B	B	B	B	-
Theme Park	A-	A	C+	D+	-
Under a Killing Moon	A	A+	A	A+	-
Warcraft	B	B-	B+	B-	-
Wing Commander II	A	B+	A	A+	-
Wolf	A-	B+	A-	A-	-
Zephyr	-	C	C-	B	-



Under a Killing Moon offers interactive mystery solving with cinematic action.

Jungle Strike (Gremlin/PC CD) Porting games from console to computer and vice versa never seems to fly. **Jungle Strike**, the sequel to **Desert Strike**, provides yet another example. There's



gratuitous FMV and a new level, but it's at the expense of game play. **Jungle Strike** also poses problems for fans of realistic combat. For example, when did Apaches develop the ability to "bounce" between two buildings, destroy the structures then fly away intact?

The graphics fail to take advantage of SVGA technology. The controls, especially on a joystick, are ridiculous—even gamers armed with multitouch sticks must flick the space bar to change weapons. Another video game classic flames out on the PC. **D-** (Laurie Yates)

Five-Game Super Pak (Masque/Windows) Card games are Masque's forte, and four of the five games included in this collection present excellent images of standard or alternate-design decks. **Blackjack** and **Caribbean Stud Poker** let players join in at a table with computerized dealer and opponents. Tutorials for both are included separately on the CD. **Video Poker** reproduces



any of several of the popular casino machines. **Solitaire Antics** comprises 21 different solitaire games (including several variations of **Klondike**), with three difficulty levels plus occasional interruptions by amusing animations featuring anthropomorphic ants. This feature may be cut off by the humorless or impatient. The final entry on the CD is the single-user version of **Chessnet 3**, an implementation of chess specifically designed for on-line play, including a chat feature and voice recognition (for chess commands only). While it does include computer-play algorithms,

worthy opposition levels are very slow. Overall score for the set: **B+** (Ross Chamberlain)

Casino Tournament of Champions

(Capstone/PC CD) The program opens with a dramatic view of Pharaoh's Casino. A wooden-lipped host welcomes, then offers the player a chance to tour the casino or get right to the games. There is a good selection of gambling games, including **Roulette**, **Baccarat**, **Black Jack**, **Pai Gow Poker**, **Red Dog**, **Craps**, **Stud** and **Draw Poker** plus **Slot Machines**. The graphics are a bit rough, but the game play is solid, and the tournament feature adds a lot of fun. This is a nice addition to any game collection. **B-** (Joyce Worley)

Car and Driver '95 Buyers Guide

(Sony/Win CD) What a way to shop! This library of information is packed with pertinent facts for the serious car buyer. Shoppers may browse the 45 makes of cars, their models and options, or view specific vehicles that meet their



personal driving criteria. **C&D '95 BG** offers decision-making assistance through buying advice, loan/lease calculations, **Car and Driver** resources and even on-line information. Away from the "showroom," **C&D '95 BG** includes an auto glossary, **Car and Driver** articles and general auto information that ranges from driving schools and car museums to EPA data. The Video Gallery, with its top-10 lists, is the place to visit during a break. There's no dropping on this shopping trip. **A-** (Marcy Waldie)

The Grammys (Mindscape/PC CD) The

Grammys have come a long way in 35 years. What started out as an attempt to honor musicians degenerated into a political struggle between veterans and new breed rockers. Over the years, musical formats such as rock, disco and even rap have invaded the distinguished halls of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

This CD audio-visual database does a solid job of bringing us some of the more memorable moments from the Grammys throughout the event's history. The CD attempts to re-create the "best" performances, but there will be

considerable disagreement over the selections. In any case, this is a well-assembled package with strong production values. Could be more interactive. **B** (Bill Kunkel)

Critic's Choice: Strategy Collection

(SSI/PC CD) This is shovelware at its best, including games by Software Toolworks (now Mindscape) and SSI before it was acquired by Mindscape. **Chessmaster 3000** is a powerful imple-



mentation of the original game of kings, including teaching modes. **Archon Ultra** is Free Fall Associates' updated version of their now classic chess-like battle between the forces of light and dark, in which each square on the board must be fought over, arcade style, with the addition of spells and changing influences. **Dark Legions** carries this concept onto more realistic battle-grounds and complex character attributes. **Serf City: Life is Feudal** is a complex world-building/resource management game set in the Middle Ages. The object is to end up with the biggest city in the land against all opposition. **Ultimate Domain** is also a **Populous**-type world-builder, but the player also has a magical quest to fulfill. Worthy. **B+** (Ross Chamberlain)

Pizza Tycoon (MicroProse/PC CD)

Some people might say that MicroProse went too far with their strategy games when they see this title, but **Pizza Tycoon** is actually a diversion, both fun and humorous, from more serious, complicated strategy games. The player must build a pizza parlor empire from the ground up and contend with all of the typical problems: competitors' restaurants, better pizzas and the mob. **Pizza Tycoon** continually pokes fun at its subject. The only joke the designers



missed was in the packaging—a pizza pie imprinted onto the CD would have been perfect.

This combination of humor, familiar strategy and wacky characters will make players understand how many headaches there can be in the pizza business and also appreciate how nice it is to send out for a pizza. Become a leader in the pizza industry—in 30 years or less! **B-** (Russ Ceccola)

Atari 2600 Action Pack (Activision/Windows CD) It was Activision that introduced the first third-party games for the Atari 2600 game system, so it is only appropriate that they also re-introduce a collection of those classic games. The most amazing thing about the 15 games in this collection is that, despite the graphics, laughable by today's standards, they are still fun to play.



Pitfall!, **H.E.R.O.** and **Kaboom!** are the best of the bunch, but the others are no less enjoyable as contests to play at work or home in the Windows environment. The simplicity of **Freeway** and **Boxing** will amaze the players of today, but they are just as fun as the more complex **Grand Prix**, **Crackpots** and **River Raid**. The **Atari 2600 Action Pack** proves that good games are worth the time no matter how old. **B+** (Russ Ceccola)

Master of Orion (Microprose/Mac CD)

This sprawling game of conquest and colonization has enough strategy to keep



it replayable for many sessions. The player takes the role of one of 10 races and competes against five other species to develop resources, design ships and send out colonists. The goal is conquest of the galaxy, and there is great depth to the struggle, as the player keeps track of

diplomacy, trade, technology and population, while experiencing sabotage and espionage. The graphics are a bit under-developed (this design is several years old), but the play value is undisputable to a detail-oriented strategic conqueror. **B+** (Joyce Worley)

Crossword Construction Set (Insight/Windows) Newsletter publishers for clubs and SIGS often like to offer puzzles tailored to their special interests.

This program won't make the professional-looking, symmetrical, tightly interwoven puzzles to be found in newspapers, but, given a list of up to 200 words and clues, will make a valiant effort to fit them all into a grid of up to 30x30 squares in size.

The creator can select from several predesigned puzzle shapes and sizes or design a new one, and then let the program use its random generation feature to try to fit the words in (as many tries as desired). A few premade puzzles demonstrate the results. The user may print out the puzzle with or without answers filled in. **B-** (Ross Chamberlain)

The Joy of Sex (Philips/PC CD-ROM—Mature Audiences)

The famous book is now a CD that leads the user through its pages, narrating from any of four points of view. The musical accompaniment is subdued but well done; the pictures are beautiful and explicit drawings, photographs and QT movies. It's annoying that you can't subdue the sound, but the material is excellent and there's a lock-out code to ensure privacy if it's needed. The disc comes packed with Dr. Comfort's book, *The New Joy of Sex*. **B+** (Joyce Worley)

Screen Thief (FormGen/PC or Win CD)

No, it's not an RPG adventure set in videoland. It's a screen-capture program that claims it "captures the tough screens other programs just can't touch." Its packaging particularly mentions grabbing screens from "state-of-the-art 3-D games"—something FormGen is familiar with. Output files can be in TIF, GIF, PCX, BMP (up to 24-Bit) and RLE formats. The program is actually two: one DOS, though it will grab some non-Enhanced Mode Windows screens; the other Windows, running in Enhanced Mode. It's also, presumably, Windows '95 ready.

Screen Thief has been around a while, accumulating improvements and features, and it has several modes of operation. These render it more useful with its many options, but also more complex and less intuitive to use than some other screen grabbers, such as **FreezeFrame**. **B** (Ross Chamberlain)

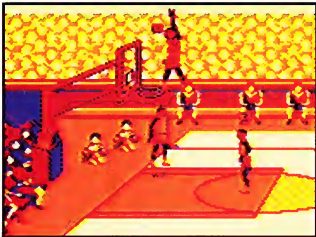
ALMOST AS REAL AS PRO WRESTLING

NBA Jam: TE strays further away from basketball

Okay. Take 27 NBA teams, cut them down to the best two or three players on each team. Then, take those athletes and give them statistical profiles that reflect their real-life performance. Now, take those stats, add unheard-of modifiers like Turbo then add action game elements like power-up icons, special abilities, hidden characters and crazy, magical jams. Is it still basketball and does it really matter?

Players looking for authentic basketball should already know that NBA Jam is not for them. If, on the other hand, players seek a wild action game with all the stars and trappings of basketball, NBA Jam: Tournament Edition is the best possible choice.

There's still a lot of real basketball here. Each athlete is rated in nine different stats, the effects of injuries are simulated and players can make substitutions, play in a tournament (which



NBA's future can be found.

Where before there were just monster jams in NBAJ, NBAJ: TE has monster jams from anywhere on the court. The Features Option lets the player toggle such wacky options as Hot Spots with different point values. When the player shoots or jams while standing on a hotspot, he scores bonus points if he makes the basket. Power-up Icons are icons that appear scattered on the court, when a player picks one up, there is an effect depending on which icon is picked up. Sample icons include speed

boosts, three-point shot ability boost, temporary unlimited turbo and Bomb, which knocks down every player on the court, except the player that collected the icon. These features really change the whole nature of the game when they are in effect.

The most glaring fault in NBA Jam: TE is the control. First, but not worst, is the straightforward control of the players. The controls are a little too sensitive and it's easy to overcorrect the onscreen figures. What's worse is the placement of the buttons. While the A and B buttons on the Game Boy are close together, when a third control is needed, all that's available is the Start button. In the default setup, the all-important Turbo feature is accessed via the Start button and, because the buttons are where they are on the Game Boy, it is almost impossible to use the Turbo button in conjunction with the Pass or Shoot button. One hand must stay on the D-pad to keep the athlete moving, and one hand has to either work the Turbo or the Pass and Shoot buttons. The options allow the controls to be set up differently, but a third hand is still necessary to play the



game properly. This unfortunate choice of controls is even used on the Super Game Boy, where it becomes even more difficult because the Start button is even farther from the A and B buttons.

Games for the portable systems are growing ever sophisticated even as portable sales grow ever smaller. The graphics and sound just keep getting better, and NBAJ: TE is no exception.

Despite the control problems, NBA Jam: Tournament Edition is the best (the only) of its kind on the Game Boy. It's a lot of fun, and players who devote enough time to mastering the controls should be rewarded with a lot of fun. **B-** (John W. Hardin)



automatically turns off all the tricky moves), and resume a tournament in progress. If the player defeats all 27 of the regular teams, there are special teams and superstar teams to be faced. (Rumor has it that the Beastie Boys are one of the special teams.)

There are at least three stars from each NBA team, for a total of more than 25 percent of the entire NBA players' roster. There's also a rookie roster where the freshest, best and brightest of the

CUTTING EDGE SPECIAL PORTABLE GAME REPORT

Nintendo is reinventing the Game Boy with the upcoming release of Donkey Kong Land.

The portable opus is remarkably like the original 16-Bit Donkey Kong Country, with graphics that turn the heads of even the most jaded Game-Doctor game mavens.

This software makes the Game Boy sit up and beg; the graphics are simply better than any other game ever seen on the portable platform. These programmers have the Game Boy jumping through hoops and performing tricks no one suspected the little black-and-yellow system could do. Read next month's *Fusion* for a more in-depth examination of the most exciting Game Boy cart to come out this year.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Acclaim
SYSTEM: Game Boy
THEME: Fantasy Sports
MEGABITS: 4
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A

Earthworm Jim (Playmates/Game Boy) The worm has turned. **Earthworm Jim** takes his ultra high-tech, indestructible, super-space cybersuit to the Game Boy, where it makes a pretty good, engaging



portable game. **EWJ** was perhaps a little overhyped for the other platforms that it appeared on, debuting to hyperbolic hails of "game of the decade" and such. **Jim** seems well suited to portable systems, though, and the game play is very full, with six large levels, all the enemies, special levels and power-ups that gave the game its cult status in electronic gaming fandom. If side-scrolling action and lots of snort jokes are for you, so is **Earthworm Jim**. **B** (John W. Hardin)

Tempo Jr. (Sega Club/Game Gear)

Music is the source of all life in **Music World**. Once a year, Major Minor, Dance Master of Music Land, holds a huge dance contest. The favorite to win is **Tempo** and his significant other, **Katy**. Wait! The evil **Zenza** kidnaps **Katy**, to keep the couple out of the dance. Now, **Tempo** must find the henchmen and rescue **Katy** in time to win the contest.

Tempo is an incredibly cute kid's game with five levels separated by mini bonus games. A password lets players come back to a game in progress. There's even some educational content, i.e.,

teaching recognition of musical scales and whatnot. The action is side-scrolling platform jumping, but **Tempo** can fly, jump, dash and throw paralyzing musical notes (must be *Muzak*). **Tempo Jr.** is colorful and fun, but may not prove challenging enough for grown-ups. **B+** (John W. Hardin)

World Heroes 2 Jet (Takara/Game Boy)

"World Heroes Battle First!" No, we don't know what the heck it means either, but that's what the MC (who looks suspiciously like a certain Italian plumber we know) says before each round. Players control any one of 16 potential world heroes and lead them



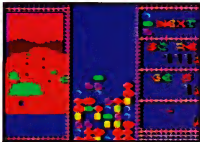
into the usual side-perspective battle against varied opponents. Fighters include the Hulk Hogan clone, the M. Bison clone, a mad monk named **Raspu** and a fellow in American football garb named "Maximum." **World Heroes 2 Jet** is very Japanese in tone and graphics. If you're looking for another derivative fighting game, here's this month's flavor. Oh, yeah—the graphics in **WH2J** are actually better if they are *not* experienced through the Super Game Boy. **B+** (John Hardin)

World Series Baseball '95 (Sega Sports/Game Gear) Simply the best baseball program in existence, **WSB**

makes an auspicious debut on portable players. Four modes of play, including a savvy pennant race with **World Series**, are available. All the major league teams are here, in the new, six division format, and all the real teams are here, too, courtesy of the Major League Baseball license. As in the 16-Bit version, there are numerous options and features to make the game flexible and fun. How does it play? Great. The controls are intuitive and easy to learn, the graphics are clear and well animated, and there is even digitized speech, so rare on the Game Gear. The best portable baseball game ever. **A-** (John W. Hardin)

Super Columns (Sega/Game Gear)

When **Columns** first arrived on the scene, it was more or less written off as a Tetris clone. It was in fact more than that. Vertical columns of three jewels descend down the screen; the player was able to shift the positions of the gems (move the middle stone to the top, etc.) in an attempt to produce a line (vertical, horizontal, diagonal) of matching gems, which then disappear. The downside: The game's tendency to play itself after a while, with players scoring matches by complete accident. In this more challenging sequel, players can actually rotate the entire three-gem segments. The game also includes the original version. Solid puzzle play. **B-** (Bill Kunkel)



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A HAUNTED HOUSE TEACHER

My Favorite Monster is a learning adventure that's spiced with some Halloween thrills.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Simon & Schuster
DESIGNER: Susan Swanson
SYSTEM: Windows CD-ROM
THEME: Edutainment
HD SPACE: 4 MB RAM
PLAYERS: 1

There's a lot to be said for using a haunted house as a background for early learning. It's got just enough spice to intrigue kids, as they click and point their way through the adventure. Yet there are also a few solid values built in that extend the program's usefulness from age 4 to 10.

My Favorite Monster provides an interactive haunted house for quite a lot of click-and-point exploration. It's stuffed with activities and music; there are also a clutch of games with more overt learning routines.

A team of ghostly playmates hang around to answer questions. A click on one of the monsters produces three questions. These questions are not read aloud (surprising in a preschool program), but a click on any one of them produces an answer articulated by that character.

Each of the four rooms and two hallways have a lot of hot spots that produce amusing animations and pleasant music. Direction pointers allow the user to view each side of the room; a zoom



feature in the living room increases the number of things to see and do.

Six games provide the learning power. Sit, Spot, Sit has the Spot-character going through his moves on command. The young choreographer can program Spot through the steps, in an exercise that teaches eight verbs.

Mooky-Oke is a four-song karaoke. The tunes were created for the program, and the lyrics are highlighted line by line (not word by word) as sung.

The Venus Fly Trap eats bugs, foods or shapes. A menu lists the plant's choices, for the child to drag the corresponding picture to the Fly Trap; this produces an amusing gobble. It also teaches the child the words, by clearly pronouncing them, and matches the words with their pictures.

Mooky's Morphin' Match is a child-size concentration-style challenge, to find pairs behind the covered squares.

M.C. Mouse's Golf Game is a simple hand-eye coordination test, and Eyeball Stew has the child drag ingredients to a stewpot, reading from an unnarrated

very young users. They're short and cute and designed for short attention spans. On the other hand, the lack of narration of some of the text portions is inappropriate for preschoolers.

The Morphin' Match game is a good version of this old standard. Kids can match picture to picture, word to word or picture to word. But here again, not everything is narrated, so the youngest player will have to play the pictures and



therefore, gain no reading skills from it. The Flytrap game at least articulates the names of the objects the plant will eat.

As an activity toy, **My Favorite Monster** will charm young users. The graphics are beautiful, and the embedded animations are plentiful. But older kids may tire of the program quickly,



recipe. Fortunately, there's just the right number of ingredients, so mistakes can't happen. The Magical Paintbrush changes the kitchen wallpaper.

The companion character changes in each room. A click on the companion produces a trio of questions; click each to hear its response. Unfortunately, the questions themselves are not narrated, so the youngest users will have to choose them randomly.

Frankly, the entertainments is a little unfocused. The entertainments are keyed to

because the memory game is the only one that really has replay value.

Clickable entertainment programs have a great deal to recommend them. With minimal parental instruction, they provide hours and hours of play. A little embedded learning is all to the good, if it doesn't get in the way of the fun.

My Favorite Monster fills the bill for the youngster from about age 6 to 8. But younger kids may have trouble with the unnarrated text, and older kids may find the fun too thin. **B-** (Joyce Worley)

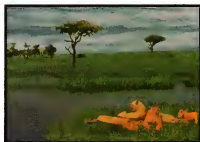
The Culinary Bookshelf (*World Library/PC CD-ROM—Adult*) “The Most Useful Food & Wine Guide Ever” is a little thin on recipes, only 170 with step-by-step instructions. But it does include a bookshelf with The Encyclopedia of Food, Utensils and Cooking Glossary; a section of hints and techniques and the Wine Cellar. There’s also a nice search routine that selects recipes to go with the ingredients on hand. **B** (Joyce Worley)

Fisher-Price Dream Doll House (*Davidson/PC CD-ROM—Ages 3-7*) There are a lot of clickables to explore, movables to drag to new locations and



playmates to be companions in the six pastel rooms. Toys, pets and household objects expose small animations. In every room there’s a mousehole that leads to an entirely new environment, with its own set of animations to watch, as the small inhabitants go about their mousey affairs. The youngest users will be charmed, but may need help to master the controls. Older tykes should have little trouble. **B+** (Joyce Worley)

ECO East Africa (*IVI/PC CD-ROM—Ages 14-Adult*) Any thought that there is no good reason for yet another wildlife program is wrong. This one brings a fresh approach to animal viewing by placing them in their natural habitats,



where the tourist can view the game park from first-person perspective, and change the field of vision by clickable compass points. (No scrolling, so it’s not true 360-degree visuals.) For more active participation, become the game warden and try to manage the park. Learn how man influences environmental efforts, or just enjoy a beautiful visit to Africa. **B+** (Joyce Worley)

Chugalong Goes to Playland (*Gem Media/Windows CD—Ages 2-6*) Chugalong the Train takes young riders to a variety of locales (zoo, farm, circus and more) to work on school readiness skills including reading, math, science,



music and social skills. Mikey and Michelle, Chugalong’s animated human friends, provide guidance and companionship through learning activities. The graphics strike a nice balance, providing sufficient stimulation without going overboard on a cuteness trip.

The catchy and appealing music is perfectly amusing, and the three-dimensional graphics and animations are meaningful and do not distract from the program’s educational intentions. A fine first product from a new company. **A-** (Laurie Yates)

Crayola Amazing Art Adventure (*MicroGrafx/Windows CD—Ages 3-6*) Is there anyone in the world who doesn’t resonate to the sight of a Crayola crayon? These icons of childhood have now made the transition to virtual coloring, courtesy of Crayola Amazing Art Adventure, with 12 different art activities, including coloring books, painting, dot-to-dot, mazes, hidden pictures, monster mix-up and more, designed to allow children to explore their creativity.

There are over 200 stickers, 60 of which can be animated. **Amazing Art Adventures** also includes a talking keyboard tool that allows children to type in different styles and letters; two types of erasers, both using different visual and aural effects. **A** (Laurie Yates)

History of Country Music (*Queue/PC CD-ROM—Age 9-Adult*) This excellent collection of information and sound cuts tells the story of the development of country music in its varied styles. The narrative is backed by period photos, with the music underscoring the history of the music. This is a tutorial for would-be music historians, or a collection for country music nostalgia enthusiasts. Indexed and cross-filed to make it easy for researchers, the music successfully transcends its plain-jane-like interface designed for the ed market. **B** (Joyce Worley)

VIRTUAL CLASS

The Smithsonian Institution and the Council of the Great City Schools presented a demonstration of what the future may hold for educators. They called it the 21st Century Urban Classroom.

Members of Congress and representatives from the White House and the Dept. of Education attended the event.

The educators inaugurated the National Urban Learning Network, designed as an on-ramp to the Internet for public schools. The Network will provide urban students and teachers access to information, video on demand, networked multimedia, distance learning and video conferencing.

The test included schools with technological capabilities from St. Paul-Minneapolis, Sioux Falls, Great Falls, Seattle, Portland, Boise City, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Tucson, Denver, Colorado Springs, Des Moines, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Casper and Omaha. The program will be expanded to additional schools in the future.

The technology includes computers with CD-ROM, printers, voice systems and video systems. It will link classrooms with remote course enhancements such as field trips and eventually replace textbooks and other, more costly, instructional materials.

Attendees of the demonstration witnessed Japanese language lessons, math studies, field trips, science lessons, interactive astronomy and physics lessons, on-line interaction with engineers and scientists plus many other interactive sessions.

Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, said, “The Urban Technology Network is one of the nation’s most extensive collaborations among public organizations, educators and commercial technology companies. Some 50 organizations have played key roles in the design of the Network ... With their support, we have created an infrastructure that offers urban students the opportunity to access a world-class education.”

He added: “Students will be able to take interactive field trips, visit libraries and museums, interact with NASA engineers and communicate with other students from around the world—without leaving their classroom.” (Joyce Worley)

IT'S JUST A BOWL OF QUERIES

Cyberlife!, edited by Marla Abraham, Rosie Piga, Joe Williams, Sams Publishing, 700 pages + CD (softbound, \$39.99)

From the introduction to *Cyberlife!*—

"The computer has changed everything. We live in a time of profound change. The pace of life is quickening. Our ability to cope with those changes is stretching our abilities as human beings. Our technology is driving the pace. 'If we can access, then it must be important.' So when technology drives us, we use technology to manage technology. As human beings, we adapt, as we always have, to the changing conditions of the planet. This time, instead of an Ice Age, we adapt to the expansion of our own knowledge by expanding our minds.

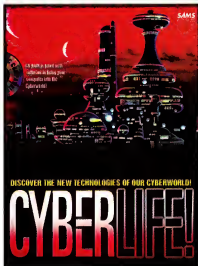
"And into that world generated from information, we bring all of our frailties and greatness. We create new forms of music and literature and art. We seek companionship and play. We even create pets and allies that crystallize our imagination or extend our wishes.

"This book is about more than cyberspace. It is about a profound shift in our place. A shift precipitated by us. It is about adapting to a future where the distinction between digital and physical becomes nearly meaningless. Where the boundaries blur between imagination and the possible. Everything is possible in the memory of a computer. So we will try everything and go everywhere. It is that inclination that we add to the equation."

Such weighty commentary in the introduction of this hefty tome certainly creates a level of expectation in the reader. One prepares to undertake an arduous journey through its 700 pages in search of enlightenment. One also takes to heart the central thesis statement and looks for building blocks to place upon that monumental foundation.

Unfortunately, the stated reach of *Cyberlife!* far exceeds its grasp. Readers are left with a teetering house of cards as opposed to a clear understanding of how their lives will change in the technological revolution.

This principal failure lies in part with the nature of the work itself. *Cyberlife!* is a compilation of essays and articles by many different writers. Compilations often benefit from the diversity of the personalities that create them, but only when the editor(s) who compile the



work do so in such a manner to keep the central thesis alive and growing stronger as each page is turned.

Cyberlife! does not enjoy such leadership, and readers are left to wander aimlessly through a mish-mash of diverse material, some of which is clearly analyzed and valuable, yet some is either misleading or hopelessly out of date.

One need look no further than the table of contents to determine that *Cyberlife!* suffers from a severe lack of organization. The work is divided into five parts. Let's assume that a reader was interested in examining the convergence of computers and music, for example. The first part, Cyberart, offers some articles, primarily reviews of Microsoft Multimedia products having to do with classical music, but these are combined in a section that also examines everything from making art on a computer to virtual architecture.

The next references one finds are in the fifth part of the book, "Making it Physical and Spiritual." Here, one finds 11 pages of speculative vision devoid of any real meat. Perusing the accompanying CD-ROM reveals *Bandbox*, *Noteplay* and *Soloist*, three rather unimpressive shareware programs that are noticeably dated.

In fact, nothing could be more of a testimony to the hollowness of the editors' central vision than their selections for the CD-ROM *Cyberlife!* compilation. To tease readers on the possibilities

of virtual reality, we are shown incredibly blocky 3-D House and 3-D Studio creations from a program that is fully five years old, if not more. Once the "ooohs and aaahs" die down, readers who are so affected must also admit to themselves that they have been living under a rock for far too long.

Please forgive the sarcasm here but the conventional defense of being an introductory title does not apply. Even if *Cyberlife!* did not have the self-importance it suggests early on, and it were targeted almost exclusively at digital neophytes, wouldn't it make much more sense to use the newest technology available for the companion CD, just to ensure that readers received a true vision of the possibilities?

Also, it would be nice if book companies who insist on doing multimedia bundling at least get a professional to stack and master their CDs. The *Cyberlife!* CD features the slowest access and screen draw times to ever clog up a 90 MHz Pentium with a double-speed CD-ROM. Were it not for the need to peruse the entire CD to accomplish this review, it would have spun straight out of the drive to the circular file in the first 15 minutes.

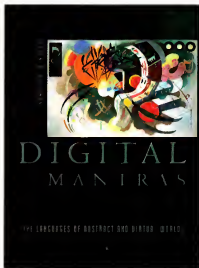
To provide a direct example of some of the more atrocious and uninspired writing that exists in some sections, one need look no farther than a 16-page essay on video game violence. Therein, the author attempts to examine several hot issues, from the potential impact of on-screen violence to the depiction of women and minorities in gaming.

Unfortunately, the analysis is so loosely subjective and misleading that the author even confuses himself. By the end of the segment, a two-page conclusion contains absolutely no conclusions, only a series of further questions, the last of which is priceless: "Does the marketplace care?"

One thing is certain: The marketplace shouldn't care about *Cyberlife!*. This effort is an obvious attempt by Sams Publishing to capitalize on a growth market. While that is not uncommon in publishing, the fact that this disorganized collection has the potential to put off a lot of budding cybernauts is criminal. (Ed Dille)

DIGITAL MYSTIC READER

**Digital Mantras, Steven R. Holtzman, MIT Press,
332 pages (hardbound, \$29.95)**



From the start of *Digital Mantras*, the reader is aware things will take a mystical bent. Any work of nonfiction about computers starting in a hut in India with a holy man can't be normal fare.

However, by the time the last page turns, the pragmatic reader might disagree with all of the implications of the conclusion Holtzman reaches, yet can't fail to be impressed and enlightened by the way he got there.

The basic premise of *Digital Mantras* is that almost every human activity is governed by a grammar: a series of rules that must be understood in order to appreciate or actively participate in that activity. This grammar, far from just being the rules to understanding the activity, contains the seeds of everything done in that sphere. For example, when a writer creates a new sentence to illustrate a concept, the grammar defines the way the concept can be expressed.

This is fairly obvious in language, where we are taught the rules from a young age. But Holtzman spends the first half of the book illustrating that the same is true of music and painting. Each of these creative endeavors uses rules that must be followed in order to make oneself understood properly by the viewer or listener. Further, these rules are an important part of the creative process itself. A bit of extension to Holtzman's theme will cause the astute reader following his arguments to see the implication that *all* human activities have a grammar of some form.

Thus, most human activities, particularly those of a creative nature, can be broken down into systems, fundamental, systems of symbolic manipulation. In

the second half of the book Holtzman spends his time examining what this means in light of a fairly obvious fact: Computers are very good at manipulating symbolic systems.

In looking into these implications, Holtzman draws very few hard and fast conclusions for one simple reason: The grammar of the digital age has yet to be fully drawn up. The reader gets the feeling that we are standing on the threshold of a bold new age roughly analogous to the period when cave men were first starting to think that naming things might be a pretty clever idea.

The final chapter of the book outlines Holtzman's interpretations of what this could mean in the long run, and here things get more than a little mystic. By providing a digital analog to the underlying structure of the universe, Holtzman argues that fundamental truths about the creative nature of reality will be exposed. He chooses to interpret these truths mainly in a Buddhist light, hence the title of the work.

For those familiar with the fiction works of Neil Stephenson and William Gibson, this book will provide an interesting reality-based view of the arguments that both of these thinkers have presented in their fictional frameworks. But the implications reach much further into our collective soul. Those working with computers in any creative way, even if they disagree with the presentation of the final conclusion of this book, should find a brilliant paradigm to help guide and understand the implications of their daily work. This makes *Digital Mantras* a must-read book for all people involved with computers in their daily lives. (John P. Withers)

DRAGON SQUIRE

**Dragon Lore, Rusel
DeMaria & Alex
Uttermann, Prima,
336 pages (soft-
bound, \$19.95)**

This book begins with a tale of a farm boy who seeks his destiny among the Dragon Knights in a magical world. This Fictional Walkthrough is a first-person narrative of not-quite-epic proportions, told with some humor and a few embellishments concerning the



hero's thoughts and impressions. The section concludes with several maps, mainly floor plans of a castle.

The next section, deftly titled Simple Walkthrough, retells the story in

second-person imperative, with specific instructions as compared to the inferences that must be drawn from the first account. These are most valuable when describing how to do battle, but some players might prefer this approach anyway. Here, too, little flashes of humor enliven the otherwise prosaic text.

The player has the choice to help the protagonist become a Dragon Knight as good guy or bad, by selecting between the paths of Wisdom or Violence. The walkthroughs provide the good guy solution; a final section in the book, called Other Strategies, offers ways the player may choose to take the darker path. This part also includes some general strategy ideas.

The whole book is heavily illustrated using screen shots. Most of the book text is done in an exotic but surprisingly readable typeface that enhances the otherworldly feeling of the game. (Ross Chamberlain)

HEIMLICH MANEUVER

License to Hurl

This past years' baseball strike really got me thinking about the way today's sports stars seem to have forgotten the fan for the sake of a buck. What's this got to do with gaming you ask? Quite a bit. As I thought about these pampered millionaire brats, it occurred to me that while baseball may be a monopoly it certainly doesn't have a monopoly on ethically lacking low-lives.

These people make *millions* while *playing a game* for a living. I don't have a problem with that except that you'd think that would be enough—but of course, it isn't. No, instead the top egomaniacs of the sporting world have all decided that they're above being included along with other "mere stars" in associations like the MLBPA (Major League Baseball Players Association) or its equivalent in other sports. Why? Because they can make even more money by working out their own separate deals with companies interested in their likeness or player information. When a developer wants to include real player data in a game they call the various sports organizations and pay for a set of licenses to cover the owners (so that things like team names and logos can be included) and the various player associations (so that nearly all the player data can be licensed as a group).

They don't give a crap about the average fan that goes out and buys **NBA Jam** only to find out that Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley aren't included. Or that David Robinson isn't in the PC version of **NBA Live '95**. No, Barkley was too busy making

a cheap buck while putting his name on a pitiful imitation of **NBA Jam** called **Shut Up And Jam**. Well, Sir Charles, your product talked the talk but it certainly didn't walk the walk. I noticed that **NBA Jam** is setting all sorts of records while your product may have set its own record, for Fastest Disappearance From Store Shelves. Meanwhile, a whole generation of young **NBA** fans learned to get along just fine without your money-grubbing likeness. If only all games like this failed. Joe Montana has a popular game in his name, so you won't find him in another one, unless of course the developer decides to spend even more money to pay him too; oh, and then there's John Elway and ... you get the point. It's absurdity at its finest.

These jocks are role models (not that they want to be but that's another argument). Don't they realize they're sending entirely the wrong message to fans by scraping every last cent out of us this way? Would Joe's® game really suffer if his info was included with all the other player data in a competing product? Not one bit.

And this problem isn't even limited to team sports. Take golf for example. When **Mean-18** first hit the shelves (10 years ago!), it included prestigious Augusta National golf course. The neanderthals who manage the affairs of the course decided that Augusta was above such things as being simulated on a computer and put a stop to it.



So, now the only way to simulate Augusta is with a popular user-created version for the now-outdated Jack Nicklaus golf game. What could possibly be better for the popularity of golf and the course than to let computer users of all ages simulate a round of golf on Augusta at the same time the real Masters is played? Is it any wonder golf is one of the last hold-outs of staunch racism and elitism? I suppose I shouldn't have expected much from people who think yellow-and-green plaid pants with a polyester shirt qualifies as hip.

I really believe we ought to start thinking about the message we send to these morally corrupt babies when we spend our own money on personally licensed products. We're telling them that we approve of such nonsense. I'm going to play a game for the quality of a game, not the name that happens to be on the cover. I'm not just going to ignore problems because some superstar wants another dollar from me. Another problem is that many marketing execs believe that the license they're buying is a license to cover up a shoddy product. They aren't bright enough to realize that we buy games on merit instead of by name. The only thing they understand is sales or the lack thereof. Remember that when you see **Shut Up And Jam II** on the shelves.

by Rich Heimlich

Rich Heimlich is a noted authority on multimedia issues. The views expressed, which were found in a waste paper basket in his friend's cellar, do not necessarily reflect those of this magazine.

Heimlich's Honor Roll

I got to play with a fantastic new device at the recent Computer Game Developers Conference. It's a new type of GamePad coming from Advanced Gravis. Its "box" plugs into a standard joystick interface and lets you play supported games with an eight-button game pad. What's more, the product also lets you plug in three more

eight-button game pads and that's not all. You can even piggy-back them for virtually unlimited game pad support. Not that anyone will support that many input devices, but it's nice to know we're finally going to get a real console-quality computer controller. Why didn't anyone figure out how to do this a decade ago?

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HEGG5

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THE KUNKEL REPORT

MISS MANNERS GOES ON-LINE

ELECTRONIC g a m e s

JULY, 1995
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 10

A DECKER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
PERIODICAL

It has become one of the most hotly discussed subjects both in print and on-line. Every day another horror story bubbles forth in which some hapless AOL refugee got fried on the Net for some apparently harmless gaffe they probably weren't even aware they'd made. Or perhaps a good friend just handed you a list of cool bookmarks—with the proviso that you share them with *no one*. Ever.

Obviously, these bitheads who think they rule the Net are in for a rude awakening as the barbarians continue to pour through the WWW gates from such populist environs as Prodigy and AOL. Pretty soon things are gonna change, right? Pretty soon the plain old users are gonna rule, and those techno-weenies will be banished back to the ghetto they came from!

Right?

Wrong. I've been hearing the stories for the past two years about poor innocents being flamed by Web regulars for "no good reason." Having some insight into the kind of people who initially built the Web, I decided to call my on-line guru, J.P. Withers, and get the straight poop. Here's the short cut on a most interesting saga, with analogs to everything from religion to racism:

The Net was not built for the masses. That may sound elitist, but it isn't. There were a group of people at remote locations who needed to communicate at a level more sophisticated than Ma Bell could provide, so they built this thing and they used it. Over the years, word spread. There had been on-line activity for years, of course—Steve Case pioneered modern on-line human interaction with Quantum Link on the C64 in the mid-'80s, with his friendly QGuides, SIGs and Private Rooms (which gave birth to everything from cybersex to 1-900 lines to JPEG images of nekkid ladies being shot around the country like erotic pinballs).

But the Net was different. It had intellectual caché, and when the walls came down, it was very much like the process New Yorkers know as "gentrification." Here's how it works: Real estate vultures spot a neighborhood with some parks and a good public transportation nexus, where a bunch of artists and lower middle class ethnic groups live. Suddenly, buildings are purchased, repairs aren't made, the exterminators stop showing up and, when necessary, some structures spontaneously combust.

The wreckage that is left is then gently

manicured and made appropriate for the more upscale renters prepared to pay topflight rates.

Right now, something like this is happening on the Net. As literally millions of newbies pour through the portals, their weight threatens to literally bring down the walls. The old-timers don't hate the newbies so much as they fear them. Even so, there are nameless Net heroes out there, spending hour upon hour rebuilding the faltering system with no expectation or interest in financial remuneration. They simply want this wonderful creation to survive.

There's another interesting spin on this gentrification metaphor, especially when you realize that on-line areas are communities, or cyberneighborhoods, if you will. There has traditionally been friction among the more testosterone-driven types when someone from another neighborhood enters their turf. Now imagine an army of these gentrification forces entering a neighborhood (in this case, the Net), prepared to burn, bribe and otherwise burrow into the bowels of this 'hood. Problem: "This neighborhood," J.P. pointed out, "is armed and ready to fight."

Another observation: I believe that Steve Case hired most of the people who originally built the Net. If the current structure collapsed, who is the only person who could step forward and offer to rebuild a kinder, gentler Internet?

The real problem, however, remains one of different communities inter-relating in a civilized manner. Why do newbies draw flames when they say things like: "Me, too!" in response to a remark? Not simply because it is redundant (as well as being an obvious suck up), it is because it *eats bandwidth*. Bandwidth is the most precious substance on the Net.

The other side of the coin is obvious. While cooler heads among the Net vets are attempting to chill the young turks, we still have people who judge others as beneath them simply because the letters "aol.com" appear after their monikers. They are not one whit different from racists, bigots or any other type of judgmental specimens who believe in pigeonholing people based on totally meaningless data.

To wrap, let's quote a great modern thinker: "Can't we all just get along?"

by Bill Kunkel

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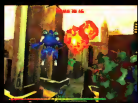
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